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FOR A WOMAN



NORA PERRY





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FOR A WOMAN

A Novel

BY

NORA PERRY



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FOR A WOMAN.



CHAPTER I.

“So *you* are going to Kineo, too, Mrs. Wainright? How nice! I didn’t expect to meet a soul that I knew. Everybody that I have seen this summer seemed to be planning a trip to the Catskills or the sea-shore.”

“Yes, we are going to Kineo,” answered Mrs. Wainright, in rather a discontented tone; “but not to the Kineo House, as you are, I suppose, Mrs. Borden. We are going into the woods. Mark has always had a hankering for camping out; and now that Harry has developed the same taste, I have

consented to try it for a while, though I am certain I shall be perfectly miserable. I like civilization, — a good solid roof over my head, and double floors under my feet. When I want Nature I prefer to look at her comfortably from a hotel piazza or for a few hours only from a mountain wagon. Jessie, now,—you've met my sister, have n't you ? Jessie, this is Mrs. Borden, of whom you have heard me speak,—Jessie thinks this camping-out plan is charming. She fancies that she shall enjoy going back to the savage state.”

“ Savage state ! Mrs. Borden, we 've got two big tents, regular swell affairs with all the modern improvements, and we 're to have floors laid, and Helen has brought a Persian rug for hers. Savage state, indeed ! You 'll come down from the hotel, and go into raptures over our savage state ! ”

“ I dare say, I dare say,” laughed Mrs. Borden, gayly ; but in her heart of hearts

she thought, "Not if I know myself." For Mrs. Borden was made after the same pattern as Mrs. Wainright, and believed implicitly in the kind of happiness and comfort one finds only in the bonds and bounds of civilization.

"Hear Jessie! she thinks it is going to be fine fun simply because it's something new," Mrs. Wainright remarked impatiently.

"That's the way my family snub me, Mrs. Borden," returned Jessie, lightly. "But there's my respected brother-in-law beckoning me to come and help him about that new telescope of his, the mysteries of which only my enterprising spirit can fathom."

Mrs. Wainright moved her chair a trifle nearer to her friend, as Jessie left them, and at the same time pulled her shawl a little closer about her shoulders; for she was sitting aft on the deck of the Kineo

steamer, and the wind was blowing up roughly as the boat came round the curve of the shore into deeper waters.

“Mark says,” she began in a lower voice, “that this kind of life will be the best thing in the world for Jessie’s health. *I* think the hotel would be a great deal better for her.”

“I didn’t know that your sister was really ill,” Mrs. Borden responded, in a tone of surprise.

“She is n’t; but there are symptoms we don’t like. She has been running down all winter, is very easily tired, and sometimes has a disagreeable cough. I don’t think she has been the same since her engagement was broken.”

“She broke it herself, did n’t she?”

“Yes, she broke it herself. I don’t suppose it was possible for her to do otherwise, for I certainly never saw such an exacting, overbearing person as John Goodwin. But

Jessie was very much attached to him. He is a handsome fellow, and I believe can be very fascinating when he chooses. I never found him so. In a worldly way it would have been a poor match for Jessie, but Jessie herself has n't an atom of worldly wisdom."

Thus the matrons, while the object of their discussion was busily occupied with her brother-in-law and his young son.

Neither of the ladies seemed to notice a gentleman who was lying stretched out upon a bench about three feet from them, with his eyes closed, and apparently lost in the oblivion of sleep. When the conversation had first trenched upon private and delicate matters, this gentleman had made a movement sufficient to call attention to his vicinity. Mrs. Wainright had glanced over her shoulder, hitched her chair about four inches away, and then, lowering her tone the sixteenth of a note,

gone on to the end of her story. The gentleman had smiled a little, and settled himself back into his comfortable position with a look and air that seemed to say, “Well, I’ve done the honorable thing in giving you warning of my presence, and the rest is *your affair*.” It might have been half an hour after this that he rose and sauntered out in the direction where Jessie was still chatting with Mark and Harry. The pure lake breeze seemed to have already acted upon the girl as a tonic; for a faint color was in her cheeks, and her tongue was running lightly in a merry tilt of talk with her young nephew. No one but a very close observer would have guessed that she was ailing in body or mind. This close observer, however, might have noticed a grayish tint about the eyelids, and that settled look of fatigue and ennui from the persistence of one unbroken line of perplexed and unhappy thought, and,

when the laughing lips were in repose for a moment, an expression of impatient discontent. But whatever Jessie Harrison may have suffered from her unfortunate love affair, she certainly was not hugging her woes to her heart, and nursing them with that morbid intensity that is the sure sign of mental unhealth. It is only the weak, sentimental nature that broods constantly over sorrow and misfortune. The strong nature, naturally healthy, struggles with grief as physical health struggles with disease.

Occupied as she was with Mr. Wainright and Harry, Jessie had no suspicion that she was being closely observed by an entire stranger who had been put into possession of her melancholy little secret. It was a very kindly observation, wholly free from ordinary curiosity or speculation. It is not likely that she would have noticed the stranger at all but for an

accident ; for though almost within hand's-breadth of them, he was quite sheltered from their view by one of the upper-deck supports. This accident was brought about by Master Harry. The boy had been wriggling, after the uneasy manner of boys, against the deck-railing, now and then swinging himself half over the rail in some sudden curiosity of sight-seeing. A big, strong boy of twelve, with only Jessie's slim hand in a clutch of safety upon his jacket. Presently a new impetus, and the slim little hand lost its hold.

“ O Harry ! Mark ! ”

But before stout, unwieldy Mark could reach them, the gentleman standing so near, yet unseen, had lifted the boy out of danger. Jessie was white to the lips. For a moment the stranger, who was regarding her, thought she was going to faint. In the next moment the color had rushed back to her face, and she exclaimed vehemently,—

“ Harry, you horrid boy, you ought to be thrashed ! ”

Harry grinned, Mark laughed, and the gentleman smiled broadly beneath his dark mustache. In another moment they were all talking together in the most sociable manner,—or, rather, Mark and Harry were thus sociable with the stranger ; Jessie, after her little outburst and the cordial acknowledgment of service which followed, subsiding into silence, more disturbed than she cared to confess. By and by her brother-in-law recalled her from the absent reverie into which she had fallen, by saying suddenly,—

“ Jessie, this gentleman tells me we ought to sleep on cedar and hemlock beds, instead of our hair mattresses. What do you think Helen would say to that ? ”

Jessie laughed. “ She ’d say we ’d gone crazy in earnest if we proposed such a thing.”

“ But I never saw any one who had tried such couches properly made, who was not converted to them thoroughly,” remarked their new acquaintance.

“ Properly made ! what do you call properly made ? ” asked Mark, interestedly.

“ Well, Thoreau in his book about Maine woods begins the lesson. He tells you to collect the smallest twigs of flat-leaved cedar, which he rightly explains is the arbor-vitæ of the gardens. According to him, you must begin at the foot, laying the twig end of the cedar upward ; and, advancing to the head, a course at a time, you successfully cover the stub ends, and get a springy and level bed. But I think I ’ve improved on Thoreau’s plan. I mix with his cedar twigs hemlock and pine. A sprinkling of pine needles gives a most delightful aromatic odor.”

“ You ’re an experienced camper, I take it,” was Mark’s response to this.

"Yes; I go into the woods every season."

"I know very little about it as yet, I'm sorry to say. This is my first experiment. I've thought every year, for a long time, that before the season was over I would camp out in the woods sure; but I have never been able to carry out my plans until now."

Mark gave a little sigh, as he concluded, for all those wasted seasons when he might have been sleeping on cedar twigs sprinkled with pine and hemlock, instead of dancing attendance upon his ambitious and worldly-minded wife at crowded watering-places.

"But how about the black flies and mosquitoes?" Jessie asked suddenly. "They are nearly gone by this time, are n't they?"

"The flies have, and this is n't a mosquito season anywhere. You're pretty safe from flies in September, though this is the very first of the month."

Mark was too well-bred to ask the

stranger's exact destination, and that gentleman was evidently not disposed to be communicative upon that point.

"One of those shut-up New Englanders," was sociable Mark's comment to himself.

Jessie, at the mention of Thoreau and the quotation from him, turned a more inquisitive look upon the stranger than she had given him before. Her principal knowledge of the hero of Walden was through that most distinct mirror of his mind,—the little volume entitled "Letters to Various Persons." John Goodwin had introduced her to this book, and it was curiously interwoven in her memory with some of the deepest emotions of her life. She wondered if this man, who seemed so intimate with the Maine woods, had as intimate a knowledge of those delicate Letters. When he had first spoken of Thoreau, she thought it would be the easiest thing in the world to speak further with him upon

the subject; but when a pause occurred, that indefinable something which had made Mark jump at his odd conclusion of locality held her silent. Before the steamer arrived she had ample opportunity to see that whenever there was conversation of any kind, it was not the stranger who sought or opened it. Always ready to answer all questions concerning a life in the woods, he did not expand into any other channel; and if she or her brother-in-law diverged into social city topics, they had it quite to themselves, so utterly devoid of interest did their new acquaintance become, so entirely apart did he then put himself, as it were. It was in one of these lapses that the gentleman withdrew himself quite decidedly from their family group; and they saw no more of him until they left the boat, when he lifted his hat in passing, with a courteous but very distant bow.

“He is just like that horrid Mr. Arbu-

ton in ‘Chance Acquaintance,’ ” Jessie remarked to her sister afterward. “ I suppose he was afraid we should become troublesome acquaintances in the few days we might be under the same hotel roof. How absurd for *men* to think of such trivialities ! It’s bad enough in women, who have nothing but their social position, as they call their little idea of a little clique.”

It was in this aggressive spirit that Jessie presented herself at the *table d’hôte*, prepared to outdo their new acquaintance in chilly courtesy. But her plan was doomed to disappointment in default of the principal object concerned. The prototype of Mr. Arbuton did not make his appearance, either at that first meal or the succeeding ones, in the time that the Wainright party were waiting for their tents to be set in order, with all that fine flooring Jessie had described. In the week that followed, the busy new life of the camp quite dis-

peled the girl's rancor, if not the cause of it, from her mind ; and when Mark inquired facetiously if she had concluded to go in for a twig bed *à la* Thoreau, she informed him that she had already set Jeremiah to work collecting the proper material.

"And, Mark, Jerry has found a few hemlock-trees and quantities of cedar and pine, so that I shall be able to carry out Mr. Arbuthon's improvement to the letter."

"Mr. *who?*"

Jessie laughed, and told her brother-in-law of her estimate of their deck acquaintance, and the name she had applied to him.

"Just like all those Boston fellows," Mark responded, in his usual conclusive way.

And so the matter and the man dropped out of their conversation and their thoughts.



CHAPTER II.

It seemed as if even Mrs. Wainright might be converted to the new life they had undertaken, so smoothly did everything move under the expert management of Jeremiah, the experienced backwoodsman who had been engaged as guide and general supervisor. As for Jessie, her brother-in-law's prophecy that such a life would be just the thing for her health certainly appeared to be in a fair way of fulfilment, if one might judge from the healthy color that began to brighten her pale cheeks, and the untiring interest with which she followed Jeremiah about, often as a helper, in his various duties. For Mark and Harry, who were off fishing

most of the time with great success, there could be no question of the fitness of things. Both father and son were in a state of supreme satisfaction from morning until night. This delightful state of affairs lasted for about a week; then suddenly, one day, the fine weather forsook them, and they awoke to find the rain pouring steadily down from leaden skies.

“Looks as though we’d hev a spell of it,” remarked Jeremiah, sagaciously.

Mrs. Wainright lifted her eyes and her shoulders in shuddering horror, and fled to the Mansard roof of her great trunk, from which she drew forth a brand-new piece of worsted work, as some beguilement from the prospect of long imprisonment.

Jeremiah was a true prophet. They had a spell of it, indeed. Five days of easterly wind,—five days of alternate drip and drizzle, with here and there a sharp shower. The “swell” tents stood the test admi-

rably ; and the little camp stove that Mrs. Wainright insisted upon at the beginning—much to Jessie's disgust, whose delight was endless in the great out-door fire which was kept constantly burning — was not a bad thing after all, in this atmosphere of dampness. On the fourth day of the storm, however, Jessie's impatience broke bounds, and she declared her intention of setting out upon an expedition through the woods with Harry and Jeremiah.

“I shall put on my rubber boots and rubber cloak ; and with this short dress I should like to know if I’m not as fitted for the rain as Mark or Harry,” was her answer to her sister’s objections.

“ ’T won’t hurt her more’n nothin’,—do her good,” volunteered Jeremiah, at this crisis.

And so, after a little more argument and with Jeremiah always on her side, she at last carried the day, and set out in the

rain, which was by that time neither driving nor fierce, but a soft foggy drizzle.

“ ’T ain’t like city mud down here ’n the woods,” commented Jeremiah, as they moved on over the pathway he had made by the cedars.

Jessie, inhaling for the first time in her life the rain exudations from cedar and pine and from the myriad growths of grass and shrub and flower, was in an ecstasy of enjoyment. The ground beneath her feet was elastic with its carpeted surface of leaf and twig,— not like city mud, indeed, as Jerry had significantly said. Involuntarily, as she realized all this freshness of Nature, in this, to her, new revelation of it, she repeated aloud from Browning’s “Saul:”—

“ How good is man’s life,— the mere living, how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy.”

“Ye’ve got a powerful memory for hymns and that kind o’ readin’, hain’t ye?” Jerry remarked, as these softly murmured words met his ear.

“Yes, I suppose I have,” Jessie answered, not a little amused, and yet with something more than amusement in the unbookish freshness of the backwoodsman, who was so much wiser than herself in all this new world of Nature.

The expedition upon which they had come was a very simple errand, to procure a certain resinous gum only found in a particular locality. Jeremiah, who was as skilled in all vegetable secrets as an Indian, had domestic uses for this substance which necessitated an increase in his failing supply. The long rain had kept him busy in other directions; but on the fourth day he gave out the cheerful suggestion that the spell o’ weather might hold on for a week longer, and he might as well “start off.”

The distance to be accomplished was a trifle over a mile and a half. It was upon this last half that Harry, who had his gun with him, sighted, as he supposed, a partridge.

“What you doin’ on? That’s a blue-jay!” Jerry exclaimed hastily, as the boy prepared to fire. There was a step backward, a sudden discharge, and Harry was lying on the ground. They never knew exactly how it was; but probably the disappointment and mortification — for Harry had begun to pride himself on his skill — caused a momentary confusion in his movements. At any rate, the gun so swiftly lowered had accidentally gone off, the shot taking effect in the lad’s right leg. Jessie suppressed her cry, and looked in mute agony of inquiry at Jeremiah.

“ ‘T ain’t nothin’ that’s goin’ to kill him; don’t you be scairt,” was the backwoodsman’s reassuring response after a quick examination.

"But what shall we do? how are we going to get him home?" asked Jessie.

"We ain't a-goin' to try. Could n't do it, nohow. We'll have to take him to Rushton's. It's only a step or two there; and if you'll take the gun and that ar bag, I kin manage the boy."

It was only a step or two, as Jerry had said; but it seemed a long way to Jessie, in her anxiety, before they came upon the solid-looking log-cabin the backwoodsman had spoken of as "Rushton's." A man was standing in the doorway smoking a short pipe; but our absorbed young lady took little note of him until in answer to Jerry he said a few words indicative of welcome, and regret for the accident. Then Jessie suddenly looked up. She had heard that voice under very different circumstances, but where? Yes, it was Mr. Arbuton's prototype,—their late deck acquaintance. In spite of her preconceived prejudice

against him she felt a sense of relief at the sight of even so slight an acquaintance in this wilderness. The gentleman himself acknowledged the girl's recognition in a sufficiently kindly manner, but with a preoccupied sort of politeness which luckily she did not notice just then. It said plainly enough that he was not particularly pleased to have his solitude thus invaded, but that he supposed he must make a virtue of necessity. There was only a moment of this preoccupation ; then he came forward and in an extremely short space of time had arranged for Harry's comfort, and despatched Jeremiah to the Kineo House for a doctor. Before night the boy was installed in the larger of the two rooms of the commodious cabin, with Jessie as head nurse, at the youngster's earnest request, and his father for general attendant. Mrs. Wainright paid her son a tearful visit ; but, admonished by the physician that the patient must be kept tranquil,

and with as few people about him as possible, she decided that it would be a much wiser plan for her to go back to the hotel for a time, as she could come to them from there quite as well as from the camp, while Jeremiah would thus be released from double duties.

Everybody seemed to enter into this plan with great readiness, Jeremiah remarking rather freely to Mr. Wainright,—

“ Mis’ Wainright’s took a load off my mind. I declare, I did n’t know what we ’s goin’ to do at first. She ’d hev a conniption fit workin’ that ar worsted work all by herself back up at your place, and she ain’t one o’ the kind to camp in here comf’tably with the rest on ye.”

It was not until all the arrangements had been made that Jessie discovered that their host had given up the entire use of the cabin to them, and betaken himself to the small tent which she had observed at a

little distance. She was standing in the doorway quite by herself when she made this discovery ; and as the gentleman came towards her from the tent, she met him with the words,—

“ It is too bad, Mr. Rushton, for us to turn you out of your house.”

“ Don’t distress yourself in the least about me. I am an old camper, and had as soon be under canvas as a log roof.”

There was such sincerity in this that Jessie could not but be reassured ; and though the speaker turned away after his reply with rather abrupt celerity, his young guest was determined not to be disturbed by it into her old manner of judgment.

“ I dare say,” she leniently philosophized, “ it may be only the manner resulting from early training, and that at heart he is all right.”

The doctor that had been brought down from the Kineo House spoke cheerfully of

Harry's wound. It was not dangerous if given time and care. When asked how soon the boy could be moved, he answered vaguely that he could n't tell,— that it was n't best to hurry, etc. And so in this way, with nothing definite settled, the whole Wainright family became domesticated at "Rushton's," as Jeremiah dubbed the camping-ground ; Mrs. Wainright coming and going from the hotel, under the escort of a Kineo guide, at her pleasure or convenience.

Their "kind host," as Mrs. Wainright would persist in calling Mr. Rushton, scarcely vindicated his right to the title by the usual attentions or amenities that are supposed to be the duties of an entertainer. It is true that he made his accidental guests entirely welcome to his woodland premises. But he evidently did not think that anything further was required of him, and retired to his tent or set off on his solitary

fishing or hunting excursions without reference to them.

"Queerest fellow I ever met," commented Mark, one day, in the hearing of Jeremiah.

"What? — who? — Rushton?" asked Jeremiah.

Mark nodded, a little annoyed that he had spoken thus in the guide's hearing. It was a sudden remark addressed really to Mrs. Wainright, as they stood together watching the departure of Mr. Rushton on one of his solitary excursions. But Jeremiah was a Maine man, shrewd and sagacious, and on his native heath felt himself always master of the situation. At Mark's nod the backwoodsman turned a reflective look upon Mr. Rushton, and after a moment said,—

"Wal, yes, I s'pose he is kinder queer accordin' to city notions,—yes, I guess there's no mistake about that. But I've got kinder used to him; he's been here

off 'n' on for quite a spell,—ten years or so. He never brings anybody with him, and he never talks much with any of us. I used to go a-huntin' or a-fishin' with him at fust, but I can't say I'm any more acquainted with him now than I was ten year ago. He's an obligin' feller and good-natured,—never see him real put out; but he ain't no talker. He's like the Injuns on that p'int; and he seems to like their company as well as anybody's, I've noticed."

"He comes from Boston, I suppose?" half questioned Mark.

"Wal, I dunno whether he does or not. I think it's likely he does, but I never ast him. He likes to hear everything you've got to say about the woods, and he can talk pretty smart himself about sech things; but I saw right off, that he wa'n't no kind of a hand to arnswer questions, so I did n't ask 'em."

Mark felt as if he had had a lesson in good manners. But Mrs. Wainright laughed as Jeremiah walked away.

“Mark, it’s lucky Mr. Rushton is just what he is, as things have turned out; don’t you think so?”

“How?—turned out! What do you mean?”

“Why, our being here so unceremoniously, and Harry’s whim to have Jessie nurse him. If your Mr. Rushton was an ordinary young man, with the ordinary manners of such,—polite, attentive, agreeable to a young girl,—of course I could n’t think of leaving Jessie here.” And Mrs. Wainright assumed her most rigid air of conventional propriety.

Her husband smiled quizzically. His wife’s fine little airs were very amusing to him sometimes.

“Well, I think, Helen, I could take care of Jessie. I guess I’m enough of a person to play propriety.”

“Oh, yes, in one way ; yet I should n’t leave her. But this young man,—why, he is no more than one of the guides, according to Jeremiiah.”

“*Young* man ! He is n’t very young ; he’s as old as I am, if not older.”

“That may be, Mr. Wainright, but he looks—well, he looks a little more of the conquering-hero sort than you do, my dear ; in fact, he *looks* like a handsome bachelor.”

“*Looks* like a bachelor ! — if that is n’t a woman’s way of getting at things, out and out !”

“It’s the truth, anyway. When you go to see a play, can’t you tell the handsome bachelor the moment he appears ? He is n’t gotten up a little bald, a little stout, and a little rheumatic, is he ?”

Mark grinned. “Come, Nellie, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to paint your husband in such unflattering colors.”

“Never mind, I’d rather have a husband a little bald, a little stout, and a little rheumatic, with an agreeable tongue, than this William the Silent; but under the circumstances, as I said at the start, it is lucky that he is just what he is. He is a safe man, you see.”

“And you wouldn’t consider an agreeable fellow like me a safe man, eh?”

“Don’t be a goose, Mark!”

Jessie, sitting beside the impatient Harry, trying to entertain him, heard nothing of this; but she did hear later from her sister an account of Jeremiah’s character-painting. Meanwhile the object of this speculation, though without a suspicion of the manner in which his character had been discussed and settled, felt vaguely that his visitors were less troublesome than he had anticipated; that they were not — the truth may as well be told — the sociable, inquisitive bores he had feared they were, from Mrs.

Wainright's effusive courtesies and Mr. Wainright's genial agreeability.

Clearly, Mr. Rushton was a man who liked to be let alone and to let other people alone. But Jeremiah had said truly, when he declared that he was obliging and good natured.

Even Mrs. Wainright was brought to see this, when one day she discovered that Mr. Rushton had been personally contributing to the amusement of the very impatient patient, whose fretfulness increased as his recovery progressed. She would have been not a little astonished at that time if she had known that it was not entirely sympathy for the sufferings of that irascible young son of hers, that prompted Mr. Rushton's attention.

Returning to camp one afternoon from one of his canoe trips, a little earlier than usual, he saw Harry's young nurse not far from his tent. She was sitting on a heap

of hemlock boughs, leaning her head against the little upright cedar at her back. There was nothing unusual in this, but there was something unusual in her appearance. The girl was sitting with her hands resting upon an open book. She was not reading. Her face was pale, the muscles about the mouth quivering with painful emotion; and tears were slowly forcing themselves from her eyelids. If it had n't been for the exhausted look she wore, James Rushton, who was not very soft-hearted, would have passed on with the conclusion that he had probably come upon a school-girlish "crying-spell." But the real suffering that he detected, and the quiet attitude forbade this conclusion. Presently, as he moved noiselessly on, dropping to the rear and skirting the cabin, he heard a querulous voice saying,—

"I'd rather have Jessie. I'll do just as she wants me to if she'll come back. You tell her."

"Well, well," responded a man's voice, — Mr. Wainright's, — in an entreating tone, "don't begin to fret now, you'll only get feverish. I'll call Jessie in a few minutes."

The owner of the cabin found his way to his tent unperceived; and, sitting there smoking his pipe, he presently heard the call that summoned the exhausted girl back to her duties. Directly after, Mr. Wainright strolled out and took comfortable possession of the hammock, while at the same moment the rattle of dice on a backgammon board proclaimed that Master Harry had succeeded in getting what he desired.

The solitary man of the woods, who ordinarily said so little to others, had a bad habit now and then of talking to himself.

"These moral and respectable people," he suddenly broke out, over his pipe, "who think themselves so much better than a

good many of their fellow beings, can be about as selfish as anybody. Here they are, taking the life out of that girl that they brought down here to cure, because this young cub must n't be crossed!"

After delivering himself of this, the smoker refilled his pipe, and puffed away for several minutes in meditative silence. But the click of the backgammon counters and the rattle of the dice seemed to disturb him ; and after a short time he got up, laid his pipe aside, took down a birch-bark pouch, filled with odd and rare birds'-eggs, and deliberately walked out and across to the cabin door. As his shadow fell athwart the threshold, Jessie looked up. She expected to see her brother-in-law, and for a moment was dumb with surprise, as her eyes encountered Mr. Rushton. But that gentleman had made up his mind to do a neighborly kindness, and was not abashed or delayed at his reception. With a cool

but pleasant inquiry about the patient, he went forward and addressed himself directly to Harry, in a way that at once made that youngster rise to the situation, as his visitor meant that he should,—like a young gentleman, instead of a peevish boy. It was not many minutes before he had him eagerly examining the contents of the birch-bark pouch, and in the full tide of questioning.

Jessie waited until she saw that she was no longer needed, then quietly stole away.

This neighborly act of kindness opened a door which Mr. Rushton found it difficult to shut; for Harry, interested and flattered, conceived a great admiration for the stranger, and, forgetting or controlling his peevishness, discovered to the older man bright and lovable qualities, to which he could scarcely help responding in a measure.

Mr. Rushton was not only an expert

fisherman and hunter, he was familiar with all woodland life, from the varieties of vegetation to the varieties of birds and animals. To Harry all this was a land of delight; and this delight, taking the form of intelligent interest, drew the two together, at length, in a natural companionable way. With the boy he dropped his stiffness entirely; and if he did not treat the others with the same cordiality, he could not quite return to his former coldness and taciturnity. There was enough of it, however, for them to feel what they termed "the traditional spirit of his ancestry;" for they did not doubt that he was a born and bred New Englander, though, like Jeremiah, they had asked no questions.

"I'm sure I'm not going to quarrel with his ridiculous priggishness, after his kindness to Harry," declared Mrs. Wainright one day. "The good he has done that boy! I shall show my gratitude by

making myself so agreeable that he will come down to us all yet."

Her husband laughed. "When you succeed you will let me know, my dear," he rather satirically remarked to her. "At the present it does n't look to me as if you would bring down your game very soon. He and Jessie, however, I believe, are getting quite chatty; and by the way, Helen, do you think it exactly *safe*?"

"Safe! Mark, what do you suppose he talks to her about?"

"I don't know,—hunting, fishing, and woodcraft generally; that's all *I* ever heard him talk about," Mr. Wainright replied, a little tinge of something like resentment in his tone, at the recollection of sundry abortive attempts of his own at sociable gossip upon other topics.

"Well, not exactly that; but it was close kin,—it was about those Thoreau books that Jessie found on the shelves in the

cabin. One of them is an account of life in these very woods. I should as soon think of a man talking of a guide-book to me," said Mrs. Mark. "But I'm glad if Jessie enjoys it, and she seems to. She was always fond of queer, out-of-the-way reading. John Goodwin used to bring her these Thoreau books, I remember."

"John Goodwin is n't much like this Rushton."

"No; Mr. Rushton is an older man. Mark, he is a good deal older than I thought at first."

"I told you he was n't a chicken, at the start."

"He must be thirty-seven or eight, or perhaps forty."

"All of that."

"And, Mark, he is evidently a man of good family and position. On that queer little silver flask he let us have when Harry was hurt, is the aristocratic old name of

Bowdoin. He told Harry, the other day, it belonged to his great-grandfather."

Mark suddenly turned and looked in his wife's face.

"Nelly, you are not up to your old — you are not thinking of making a match between this aristocratic gentleman and Jessie, are you? The last thing I knew, you were congratulating yourself that he was a safe man,— that there was no danger of his talking sentiment."

"Mark, you are so stupid. That was entirely on the ground of the — the proprieties. I saw that this man was not a man to *flirt* with Jessie."

"Oh, that was it; but now you see that he is not of the flirting kind, you think he may be of the marrying kind. *I* think you are going rather fast, Mrs. Nelly, on the strength of an old silver flask for a pedigree."

"How ridiculous you are, Mark! You

know that I am not a vulgar match-maker. I was only glad that Jessie seemed to enjoy herself, and I was glad that the man was a gentleman ; and if I thought perhaps she might be — ”

“ Consoled for John Goodwin by this descendant of the Bowdoins. Oh, yes ; I see you ’ve progressed rapidly, Nelly, since Harry gave you that piece of information, but I ’m not going to have Jessie flung at this aristocrat’s head.”

“ Fling Jessie at a man’s head ! Mark, ain’t you ashamed to talk so to me ? As if I should do anything like that, and Jessie my own sister ! ” and Mrs. Mark began to flush about the eyelids.

“ Nelly, I did n’t mean — ”

“ Yes, you did.”

Mark was silent. He felt that discretion was the better part of valor sometimes.

There was quite a long pause after this, which Mrs. Mark broke by saying,—

“Mark, there is only one thing that I want to suggest; and that is, *if* you see that Jessie does seem to like this man, and he likes her, that you won’t be premature and interfere. I always thought if you had n’t asked so many questions, talked so much as you did, when young Archer came to the house directly after the end of the John Goodwin affair, that *that* might have come to something eventually, — a heart is often caught in the rebound, you know.”

“How you do want to marry Jessie off, Nelly!”

“I want her to forget John Goodwin; and to marry some one else is the surest way.”

“That depends upon the man.”

“Then Jessie has nothing, you know.”

“I’m sure I never grudged Jessie anything. I should always look out for her.”

“Yes; I know you have always been

very kind since she came to us, but you have your own to look out for, and — well, there is no question that if dear Jessie should meet with a good opportunity, it would be better for her to marry. Now, would n't it ? ”

“ Well — yes — if she has a good chance, as you say, no doubt it would.”





CHAPTER III.

“WHAT do these people mean? Is it sheer carelessness, heedlessness, or what?” James Rushton asked himself, when he had roused to the fact that Mrs. Wainright and her husband seemed to trouble themselves very little about their young sister. “Perhaps this is the fashion now-a-days. I’ve been out of the world — their world — so long that I’m a little rusty.” He reached forward, as he said this, to fill his pipe, and got a glimpse of his face in a shaving-mirror he had set up against the tent canvas. A slight smile stirred his lip as he caught sight of the sprinkling of gray in his dark hair.

"So, perhaps I 'm a little out in my reckoning, and they consider me a patriarch," he muttered. "That 's all very well ; but they are a pair, those two. Oh, these American guardians ! However, they can manage their own way, 't is n't my affair. The girl, though, is n't of the modern American pattern. She has no self-conscious arts, but seems innocent like the boy."

The "boy," it was quite certain, had won his way into the good graces of this rather eccentric gentleman.

Mark had at the first been devoted to his son, not in the way of diverting him,—that fell to Jessie at once,—but in the necessary care his condition then demanded. As the youngster began to mend, however, he was left pretty constantly in charge of Jessie ; and later, this charge was lightened by Mr. Rushton, from the good-natured motive already recorded.

Harry himself, promoted from the cabin to the woods upon a camp couch, and instructed by Mr. Rushton in various ways of manipulating birch-bark with a jack-knife, together with other simple arts of woodcraft, was content and happy, and entirely reconciled to his father's frequent expeditions to the lake or the woods with Jeremiah.

It was on one of these expeditions, when the three strangely consorted companions were sitting alone together in the wide radiance of the camp-fire, just after twilight had fallen, that Mr. Rushton discovered a piece of phosphorescent wood ; and as he brought it forward, Jessie exclaimed,—

“ Oh, I remember that Thoreau tells about that. I was reading it only the other day.” And obeying an impulse she ran into the cabin for the volume. Sitting in the great circle of light, she found the passage in question, and read it aloud to her two

auditors. Mr. Rushton added some experiences of his own of a like nature, holding the curious substance in the crown of his hat as he talked, for Harry to see the strange glow.

“This is about the same locality, too, where Thoreau was when he found it. Turn back a page or two and read a description of that camping-ground. It has changed, of course, since then; the forest has been thinned out in these five-and-twenty years.”

“And did you know—did you choose the same spot because Thoreau was here?” Jessie asked rather eagerly, after she had read the description of the camping-ground.

Her companion smiled a little amusedly.

“No; I didn’t choose it for any sentiment of that kind. I had read his ‘Maine Woods,’ and when I happened to hit upon this spot I recalled his description.”

Jessie felt as if she had been laughed at, and a slight flush rose to her cheek.

Mr. Rushton was not unobservant. He had become acquainted with some of her enthusiasms and her sensitiveness, before this. Presently he asked rather abruptly,—

“Had you never read Thoreau until you came here?”

“Oh, yes.”

“It is rather unusual reading for a young person, is n’t it?”

“I don’t know.”

“There is another of his books which is less known than the ‘Maine Woods,’ — a volume of his letters. Did you ever read that?”

“I — a friend I had once, read some of the letters to me.”

The rosy flush faded very suddenly, and left her with a startled look of pain, as if somebody had touched a sore nerve.

Mr. Rushton at once recalled the story

he had heard on the deck of the steamer, and understood the faltering words, "a friend I had once."

"The girl loves the man yet, and very likely always will. She is probably one of that kind," was his inward reflection. Then, to turn her thoughts or to give them a different direction, he remarked, —

"Thoreau is interesting ; but I think he was rather a conceited man, and not as original as some have supposed. He always struck me as greatly influenced by Emerson. He loved the woods freely and naturally ; but his manner of expressing himself, his attitude towards the world, was largely affected by Emerson."

"But he must have had strong sympathies in that direction, must n't he, to have been so influenced ?"

"Oh, of course ; but people generally seem to think he was a great original in everything, — in his mode of life, his

thoughts and expression. You know what Emerson himself said of him, don't you?"

"No."

"That he was a person to be *loved*, but not *liked*."

Jessie lifted her head with a new interest in her face.

"Yes, I can see that might have been. I can understand it, though I should never have thought to separate feelings like that."

"I dare say you can understand, for I dare say that sweetheart of yours is just of this unlikable kind," thought Rushton, as he noted the expression of conviction upon her face.

To Mrs. Wainright, who had never read a line of Thoreau in her life, and who only knew Emerson by name, all this would have been unintelligible. It was something of this very kind of talk — guide-book talk, as she called it — of which she had spoken

to her husband ; but she did not understand wherein lay the fascination for her sister.

John Goodwin had become so associated with these volumes of Thoreau in Jessie's mind — John Goodwin at his best — that once having found some one else who knew and understood these pages, she could not keep silent concerning them. By and by the altogether different criticisms and conclusions of her new acquaintance woke her up to new ideas, and stimulated her to new thoughts. To Rushton this younger, fresher mind, full of originality and daring, yet shadowed here and there by her unhappy experience, was, after he fairly got a glimpse of it, pathetically interesting to him.

“ Good Heavens ! how much the girl believes ; and how much she has got to learn, poor little soul ! ” he thought one day, while she was expressing some optimistic

views with more than ordinary earnestness. Something of this he said to her in a half-bantering way. She caught only the banter, not the underlying kindness, and suddenly retorted,—

“ You always laugh at me when I talk earnestly about things, Mr. Rushton. Don’t you believe in any kind of enthusiasm ? ”

“ I do, most emphatically ; and I was n’t laughing at you, I assure you. If I seemed to do so, it was only the awkwardness of an older person whom enthusiasm sometimes frightens a little.”

Jessie was not yet sure of his meaning ; and after regarding him for a moment perplexedly, she asked abruptly,—

“ Mr. Rushton, what *do* you believe in ? ”

He turned upon her a sort of surprised look ; and after a second or so, without a remnant of his former lightness of tone, he said,—

“I believe in innocence—and ignorance.”

To his amazement the hot blood mounted scarlet to her cheeks, and she cried out,—

“Mr. Rushton, I am *not* an ignorant child. You speak as if—” She stopped, hesitated, and instead of finishing her sentence as she had evidently intended, impetuously said: “A very wise man, a friend of my father, said once, ‘It is not innocence merely that we want, but nobility.’”

There was a moment of silence. In that moment Mr. Rushton looked out through the lake-path, where a glimpse of silvery blue flashed with crystal clearness. When he spoke, his voice had in it a tone of suppressed vehemence that might have suggested anger but for the sombre earnestness of his face.

“You entirely mistake me,” he said. “It was not as an ignorant child, as you

express it, that I addressed you, and I quite agree with your wise man in regard to innocence and nobility ; but perhaps even you, if you live to be forty years old, will regret the inevitable knowledge of evil that has come to you. It may be, it doubtless is, part of the discipline of life, as moralists and philosophers say, and the result at the end may be unmixed good ; but the immediate results apparent in this world are too often disastrous for one to look forward to them for another with anything but pity. Your ideas, your views of life, are naturally, as they ought to be at your age, optimistic. It would be monstrous if they were not. But when a man as old as I am is suddenly confronted with such ideas, he cannot but look back ; and the looking back may — nay, must — bring pain and regret, and sometimes still deeper suffering. It was this feeling that made me answer you as I

did. I felt, as you spoke, that nothing could be so desirable as innocence and ignorance."

These last words were uttered with a sort of sad impatience. At the same time the speaker left his seat, and began walking up and down, stamping the fallen leaves under his feet, with a like impatience in every movement. Jessie did not attempt further question or argument. She had no desire to do so. Her irritation was quite extinguished, quenched by the sombre vehemence she had invoked. She thought the subject was entirely dismissed; but after a few minutes, the restless walker stopped and turned a very different face towards her. There was a half-quizzical smile about his mouth as he said to her,—

"Why is it that young people always resent the slightest reference to their lack of bitter experience? There is a certain period when men and women seem ashamed

of the natural exemptions incident to their youth."

"I don't know," Jessie replied, smiling a little in return, "unless it is that we are taught to respect knowledge, and we know that mature people are superior to us in that, and everybody always reaches up after superiority of any kind."

"You put it very well, very well indeed; but this proves that there is not enough discrimination in these early teachings. I have been of the opinion for a long time that the value of ignorance in some directions might be taught with a great deal of benefit."

"Sometimes," Jessie returned rather wistfully, ignoring his last words, "bitter experience does come to the young without their seeking or desiring it. I suppose even a limited experience of that kind matures one."

Mr. Rushton gave a quick glance at the

girl as she said this. "She is thinking of her poor little disappointment in that transcendental young prig who read Thoreau to her," he thought. The next minute he was saying,—

"It depends upon what you call bitter experience. I should n't call any of the ordinary disappointments in — well, say our early estimates of character in those we term our friends, bitter experience, as quite young persons always do."

Jessie lifted her head, surprise and protest in her eyes.

"What *do* you call bitter experience?" she asked.

"I call that bitter experience when one, through circumstances and one's own faults, injures one's self and others beyond reparation."

"Yes; that may be the *bitterest* experience, but I don't think it makes disappointment of another kind less bitter."

“Don’t you? Well, I hope you’ll never come to think differently. But let me say one thing more,—whatever you may have suffered through disappointments in your estimates of friends, take my word for it, at your age the bitterness is not ineffaceable. In youth, disappointments of that nature belong to the sentiments, and sentiments change.”

A little lump rose in Jessie’s throat; but she resolutely repressed her inclination to cry, and rising from her seat turned abruptly away.

“Oh, how narrow, how unsympathetic, he is!” she thought indignantly. “He thinks, because he has outlived certain feelings, that everybody may outlive them.”

James Rushton had not meant to produce just the effect that he did. He had a sincere desire to do a service, not to inflict a wound; but he argued from a standpoint so entirely different, and this

standpoint so unknown to her, that it was impossible for her to understand that he was not speaking from deadness of feeling, but a living difference. It did not take him long to see how he had failed.

“What a meddling fool I have been!” he soliloquized; “as if such advice could possibly be accepted. She has got to find out such a fact for herself. I’ve not only been a meddling fool, but an impertinent one.”

It was but natural that this annoyance at his own conduct should give to his manner a gentler bearing when he met her afterwards. Jessie, too, from dwelling constantly upon the harsh advice, could not help thinking of the adviser, who, she presently saw, by no means meant to be harsh. Weeks of serene agreement could not have brought these two into the companionship that this little jar of disagreement effected. The man felt as if he had wantonly hurt

an innocent creature to prove his own wisdom, and his contrition showed itself in a new deference and kindness, in which for a time he forgot his attitude of reserve. The girl, wounded and sore, looked back to the pleasanter and less argumentative talk, with a sense of regretful loss at first. In this state of mind the new softness that met her was such a grateful surprise that it at once overcame any lingering resentment, and her sweetness of response struck Rushton as peculiarly generous.

“She is not womanish, like so many of her sex, but womanly,” he reflected. Then quickly following came the thought, “What a prig that Goodwin must have been to have made a quarrel with her so long-lived!”



CHAPTER IV.

TIME does not race past so swiftly in the woods as in towns and cities. A day in the woods, though by no means leaden-weighted, may be reckoned as thrice the length on account of its freedom from the thousand little exactions that inevitably accompany the method and arrangement that are part of the structure of conventional civilization. Thus, though in reality it was but two weeks since Harry met with his accident, it seemed to both Jessie and her nephew as if they had been acquainted with Mr. Rushton a much longer period, as they looked back. Harry at the end of the two weeks still limped a little, had still to be

helped and cared for ; and it was generally Mr. Rushton or Jessie who was ready to give him this care. Mark did not try to shirk his fatherly duties, but when he saw the boy so well contented and occupied, he accepted the situation with great cheerfulness, and took his easy way, gunning and fishing, or running up to the hotel for his mail, as the case might be. There had been a talk of returning to their own camping-ground when Harry was able to be moved. The dismay with which the boy received this intimation, the mute appeal in his face, as he turned to his new friend at the first suggestion, could not but call forth from that gentleman a further offer of hospitality. This might not have been accepted, however, but for the fact that the youngster's appetite actually gave way before the prospect of changing his agreeable quarters. It was not only that he disliked giving up Mr. Rushton,

to whom he had taken a warm boyish fancy, but he knew that he should also give up a great deal else that was enjoyable. He had found a mine of treasure in the cabin and tent,—simple things enough, which the owner had collected as specimens, but which to the city-bred boy were an endless delight. Then “Rushton’s” opened out upon the borders of the lake. This was in itself a great charm and a great advantage to Harry, and reason enough, if there were no other, why one would be loath to leave it.

Mrs. Wainright, when informed of this delay, inwardly rejoiced; but outwardly she expressed to her “kind host” much chagrin. It was too bad. His hospitality would be quite exhausted, etc., etc., delivered in her most gracious manner. To all this Mr. Rushton listened with a cold gravity that was certainly not encouraging; and his few conventional words of reply,

as she paused, could scarcely be called cordial. That their “kind host” did not admire her as he should, she was perfectly well aware by this time; that he had on the present occasion been cold almost to rudeness, she was also aware; but that the interpretation was derogatory to herself,—that for a moment he suspected her, could see below that fine glittering surface of her amiability to the worldly plans that involved him,—she had not the remotest idea. As Harry had improved, her visits to the camp had become more and more infrequent. “I am not needed there; I am, instead, rather in the way just now,” she sapiently concluded.

One day Mark seemed suddenly to wake up to the fact of his wife’s gradually lessening visits. He wrenched his thoughts, with a virtuous effort, from the charms of the lake and the forest, and set himself to considering certain matters of a different nature.

The result of this was a suggestion to Mrs. Wainright, when he went up to the hotel for his letters, that Harry really no longer needed Jessie's care, and that perhaps she had better join her sister at the Kineo.

"What! you want to get rid of Jessie?" asked Mrs. Wainright.

"Get rid of her? No; but I thought, under the circumstances, that perhaps you would think it best to take her to the hotel with you."

"What circumstances?"

"Helen, you know perfectly well what I mean. We are on another man's ground, are n't we?" this in an irritated tone.

"Mr. Rushton has n't bought the territory about him, has he?"

"And I thought you would think it a matter of propriety, as there is no reason for keeping Jessie with us any longer," he concluded, ignoring her flippant question.

"No reason! Mark, I think you are

losing your memory. Did n't the doctor advise that Jessie should live out of doors,—in the woods? And just look at her, and see how she is thriving under it. I never knew *you* to be so ridiculously conventional. I thought you felt quite competent to the charge of Jessie awhile ago."

"Competent? yes; but now—"

"As if there could be any impropriety in Jessie's staying with you and Harry! She's almost as much of a child to you as Harry; and you stand in the place of a father to her."

"Perhaps you think Rushton stands in the place of a father to her!"

"I thought we settled all that at the first,—what Mr. Rushton was and was not. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go down to-morrow and see if Jessie would like to come back with me."

Jessie welcomed her sister with great cordiality.

“I don’t see how you can stay up at the hotel when you might be here in this lovely place,” she exclaimed to Mrs. Wainright.

“It has n’t the same charms for me that it has for you. You know, I never did enjoy out-door life as you did. But how well you ’re looking, Jessie !”

“Yes ; I feel like a new creature. Oh, I can take such long walks, and I ’ve learned to paddle a canoe.”

“Dear me ! I hope you won’t upset yourself,—canoes are so easily upset.”

“Oh, I don’t go out alone in one, of course.”

“Well, if Jeremiah goes with you, I shall feel safe about you.”

“Jeremiah ! Oh, I don’t go with Jeremiah. Jeremiah did n’t teach me ; it was Mr. Rushton. Why, he is much the more skilful canoeist. Jeremiah says he is the best he ever saw, except an Indian.”

“Very well, if Mr. Rushton really knows

the lake, I suppose he is capable of taking care of you. Is he as stiff and stand-offish and disagreeable as he was, Jessie?"

"He is n't a bit stiff and stand-offish when you come to know him, Helen. He's a little abrupt and downright sometimes, but he is really kindness itself."

Mrs. Wainright was a guest of the day, and Jessie was full of plans for her. One plan was to go out on the lake. When she had everything arranged satisfactorily, as she thought, she found that Jeremiah stood in Mr. Rushton's place in the canoe.

"He'd laid out to go off with Injun Dave after moose, so I told him I'd come along with ye," explained Jeremiah.

Jessie looked disappointed. Mrs. Wainright elevated her eyebrows.

There was thunder in the air, and threatening of a tempest late in the afternoon, when Mrs. Wainright had arranged to return to the hotel.

"If it *does* rain, it 'll come down like blazes pretty soon," Jeremiah affirmed very decidedly.

Mrs. Wainright did not think it wise to risk a deluge. Besides, she had not as yet accomplished her mission. It proved, however, that Jeremiah was out in his reckoning. There was only a slight sprinkle, and that speedily over; but it was too late then to go back to the hotel, and the consequence was, that when Mr. Rushton came in from his moose-hunt, in the early evening, he saw the camp-fire shining upon Mrs. Mark's animated face and lighting up the jingling bangles upon her wrists. Mark was in his glory. He had succeeded, with Jessie and Jeremiah's help, in cooking a very appetizing supper. The aroma of the coffee wafted gratefully towards Mr. Rushton, as he approached.

"Ah! here you are," proclaimed Mark, jovially, "just in time. I thought you'd

get in about now. Come, Jessie, hurry up with your cakes."

Jessie came forward with a dish of corn-meal pancakes, crisp and hot. Her cheeks were reddened by the fire, and her eyes shone dark and lustrous. The high white bib apron, with its ruffle about her neck, made her look like a child instead of a young woman of twenty. She smiled with frank pleasure at Mr. Rushton.

"See," she cried proudly, holding out her dish of cakes; "I made them all myself, after your recipe."

He gave an appreciative sniff and a nod of approbation.

"H'm," mentally commented Mrs. Wainright, "'not a bit stiff and stand-offish when you come to know him.'"

The supper was a success in every way. If Mr. Rushton had evaded Mrs. Wainright in the early part of the day, he made the best of the situation in which he now found

himself, and though never a lively element in a party, he became reasonably sociable over his coffee and trout and Jessie's corn-cakes ; and afterwards, when he and Mark sat smoking, he vaguely listened to Mrs. Mark's light chatter and gossip with forbearance if not enjoyment. But by and by his mind wandered to other subjects. The day had been long and fatiguing, and before he knew it he had dropped into a doze. The falling of one of the great fiery logs, and somebody's exclamation aroused him.

“Eloped with her father’s coachman,” he heard Mrs. Wainright saying. “Such things are getting to be altogether too common. I don’t blame the father for having nothing more to do with her.”

“The paper says the man is intelligent, and has some education,” Mark’s voice interposed.

“Oh, Mark, don’t urge any excuse for such a *mésalliance* as that.”

"Excuse! I'm not offering any excuse."

"It is n't so bad as marrying for money and position solely, as Grace Upton did," exclaimed Jessie.

"Oh, Jessie, how *can* you?"

"But it is n't, Helen. This girl had some real true feeling for the man she married. Grace sold herself for money and a name."

Mr. Rushton bent forward to light his pipe anew, and Mrs. Wainright presented the case and appealed to him for his opinion. He gave it with an energy that astonished her.

"I think it is an abominable business, whichever way you look at it. I don't agree with your sister that it was true feeling at all. I should say that the young woman was both silly and selfish. She has, no doubt, been allowed to feed on trashy novels all her life, and this is the result of it. If she had been properly

trained and looked out for by her parents, the thing could n't have happened. I have no patience or sympathy with unequal marriages of this description."

"But, Mr. Rushton," — and Jessie leaned forward eagerly, — "is n't it better, bad as it is, than such marriages as that I mentioned, of Grace Upton's?"

"Both are bad,—as bad as they can be; yet I'm not sure but I should prefer Miss Upton's course to the other. She, at least, gets what she bargains for, and her family are not sacrificed by it."

"Oh, Mr. Rushton!" cries Jessie, in frank protesting tones.

His face loses its frowning gravity, and lightens with a smile.

"You think I am very worldly in my estimates; but wait a moment. I don't defend Miss Upton and her kind; but I do insist that if she marries for definite practical advantages, she gets what she

bargains for, and her family do not suffer for it. The other young woman can't by any possibility get what she bargains for ; her unhealthy little mind is n't capable of a good sound sentiment. She is 'doing theatre.' What she is after is some Claude Melnotte rubbish or other, and in this pursuit she is perfectly willing to sacrifice her parents and every family affection and interest. No," — now dropping his serious tone altogether, — " if I must make a choice, I go in for the practical Miss Upton ; she does n't work half the mischief of the other.

" There speaks the born aristocrat," flashed across Mrs. Wainright's mind, while in the same flash she thought triumphantly of the little silver flask, which had suggested so much to her. But her voice sounded rigidly virtuous and single-thoughted as she said,—

" You're quite right ; I agree with you entirely."

"Your sister does not; she thinks I am a mercenary, worldly wretch."

This was uttered with a little bantering smile directed towards the sweet disapproving face that rose Clytie-like, and with something the same expression, from the full falling ruffle.

"Oh, well, Jessie is young and romantic. When she gets older she will understand."

"Yes; when she attains to our years, she will no doubt see things differently."

Mrs. Wainright smiled with serene politeness; but she winced at the satiric tone, half veiled under the lightness. They were both taken by surprise when Jessie suddenly said,—

"I don't disagree except on one point; and that is, that nobody has a right to judge individual cases so sweepingly as you, Mr. Rushton, judge the girl who marries for what *she* thinks is love. Such judgment is unfair, uncharitable."

"I dare say it may be. It is an easy thing to sit in judgment on other people, and I'm a positive, conceited fellow when I get started, Miss Harrison."

The smile with which he regarded her, as he said this, was very pleasant and winning. Taken together with his words, they conveyed a good deal more to Mrs. Wainright than to her sister, or than James Rushton himself had any idea of conveying.

"Now, if Mark will only let things alone, and hold his tongue," his wife reflected, as she reviewed the evening later on. Considering the matter further, after she had retired for the night, she came to the conclusion that she had better sacrifice herself for a few days by remaining where she was, and keeping her blundering husband fully occupied by attentions to herself.

Mark was delighted. He at once began to make plans for her entertainment, none of which met her entire approval; for in

every one he had managed to project himself in a way that, to Mrs. Wainright's experienced vision, would cause him to be omnipresent. From objecting to this and to that plan, she finally got the matter into her own hands, and soon had things to her mind. None of her party had yet been up Mount Kineo; that was, of course, the excursion for them to take. They would go over to the west side in the canoe, starting after an early dinner, and return at sunset or later. The mountain was easy of ascent, and—well, at any rate, they could go as far as their strength permitted. This last was added in response to her husband's remark that she might find it tiresome, and that he rather feared that Harry could n't do much climbing yet. However, it was a pleasant trip across, and the west shore was new to them, and altogether there was nothing more to be said by way of objection.

When Mr. Rushton was told of this plan, and told also that it included himself, he looked rather grim and as if he contemplated making excuses ; but he soon saw that that would involve giving up the excursion entirely, for the party was too large for one canoe, and they had counted upon him to manage the smaller craft, Mr. Wainright not being expert enough to be trusted. After a minute or so of hesitation he accepted the situation with a “Very well,” turning away, as he spoke, from Mrs. Wainright’s elaborate thanks, which always, to his ear, rang false. Jessie, who had observed his hesitation and his grim face, followed him as he turned away, until she was out of ear-shot of the others ; then, rather timidly, she called,—

“ Mr. Rushton.”

He looked round inquiringly.

“ You don’t want to go on this excursion, Mr. Rushton, and I wish you would n’t,

please. I feel ashamed at the way you have been made to do things, and to give up your own way, and your quiet and everything," she said in a troubled voice.

"Oh, don't worry about that, Miss Harrison. To be made to do things and give up my own way, won't hurt me. I was n't thinking of that,—a very different matter was in my mind." He nodded to her reassuringly, the grimness of his face relaxing as he did so.

"What a difference between the two! I wonder if they can be children of the same father and mother," he thought, as she left him.

Mrs. Wainright had divided her party very happily. In the larger canoe she bestowed herself, her husband, and Jeremiah; in the smaller, Jessie and Harry with Mr. Rushton. The day was perfect,—soft, yet clear, and with a brilliant sky. The canoes were close neighbors for a

while ; then Mr. Rushton's stroke sent his smaller, lighter-weighted craft ahead. His face seemed to drop its grimness as he got out into the lake ; his manner, too, lost the something of stiffness and preoccupation that had disturbed and perplexed Jessie, and when presently he began to answer Harry's brisk questions in his usual manner, her cloud of vexation lifted. It was a charming spot where they landed, the shore gently sloping and irregular, the wooded interior stretching before them, Mount Kineo rising invitingly in the mellow atmosphere, touched with sudden splendor here and there by the sun's rays. Waiting for the others to come to shore, they strolled about, discovering some young growths of the balsam-pine, the sprays of which Jessie began collecting with a view to a balsam-pillow.

When Mrs. Wainright arrived she found her son busily employed in attempting to

launch a toy craft he had brought with him, and in the distance the voices of her sister and Mr. Rushton, mingling together in a very sociable manner, reached her ears. In a few minutes the two came in sight, the gentleman carrying an oddly shaped bundle over his shoulder, traveller fashion.

“Holloa! what have you got there?” shouted Mark.

Mr. Rushton laughed a little as he flung his pack down, and explained that they had found some young balsam-pines unexpectedly, and he had improvised a bag for Miss Harrison out of his light tweed overcoat, which he had fortunately put in the canoe.

Mrs. Wainright looked at the face that had turned so grimly upon her an hour ago, then at the trim tweed overcoat rolled into a shapeless mass, and thought of Mr. Arbuton and the heedlessness with which

he had sacrificed a similar garment upon a less peaceful occasion. At the glance, at the thought, a light sparkle — it might have been at the recollection invoked, it might have been some present triumphant conclusion — shone in her eyes.

“ And there are ferns here, Helen, just here a step or two back,” exclaimed Jessie.

“ Ferns ! ” and Mrs. Wainright was all animation.

“ Now, don’t waste your strength at the start, Helen,” warned her husband, as he saw the energy with which his wife turned to follow Jessie’s suggestion.

But Mrs. Wainright knew quite well what she was about, and the extent and limit of her strength much better than her husband did.

“ Just a step or two back,” Jessie had said ; but step by step Mrs. Wainright led her husband a fine chase as he danced attendance upon her. “ Only one fern

more," or "I must see what variety this is," etc., until Mark's patience began to give out. "But Helen came down from the hotel to please me, and I ought to let her enjoy herself as she chooses. This is her picnic, not mine," he reasoned with himself.

Presently, however, he drew a sigh of relief, as Jessie came forward to urge that there should be no more delay in going up the mountain.

Mrs. Wainright turned a flushed and wearied face towards her sister, and sitting down in an exhausted manner, began to fan herself with her hat.

Mark gave a little growl half under his breath.

"She's tired herself out, as I thought she would," he exclaimed disgustedly.

"I do feel tired," admitted Mrs. Wainright, "and I don't believe I had better try to go just yet; but that is no reason for delaying anybody else,—no reason for your

not setting out at once, Jessie. Then, a little later, if I feel rested, we will come after you ; if not, we will wait for you here."

" Well, if we are to go, we ought to go at once, Mr. Rushton says. Come, Harry !" called Jessie, moving off.

" Oh, Jessie, I don't think Harry ought to go. He does n't seem so strong as I thought he was,—not strong enough for climbing."

Harry broke forth into vigorous protest.

For a few minutes there was a sharp conflict, which ended at last in Mrs. Wainright's victory ; her final neat little sentence, delivered in a plaintive tone, carrying the day,—

" The doctor told me, when I left the hotel, on no account to allow Harry to take any violent exercise."

And thus it came about that Jessie went up the mountain alone with Mr. Rushton.



CHAPTER V.

THE ascent at the start and for some little distance up Mount Kineo is steep enough to preclude anything like conversation. After that, the way is irregular and easy, coming now and then upon lovely places where one can rest and take breath of the sweet air, in little shaded nooks and -thickets. Quick, and sure of foot, Jessie began to enjoy herself thoroughly as they went on. Her companion, too, seemed to throw off for the time whatever mood may have been out of harmony with the perfect spot and the perfect day. The petty atmosphere which Mrs. Wainright always somehow brought with her

presence vanished as they got into that upper air.

“ You would win the approval of Indian Dave himself for your powers of climbing,” was a commendation that Jessie specially appreciated from so skilled a woodsman as Mr. Rushton. They had come to the first resting-place as he said this; and the girl’s face, bright and sparkling, offered distinct contrast to the pale, hollow-eyed creature of a few weeks ago.

“ What is it you are thinking of?” she asked, as she met his critical glance.

“ I was thinking how well you are looking. Camp life seems to agree with you.”

“ It does. I haven’t felt so well for years,—not since I was a child. I feel like a new creature.”

“ She *looks* like a new creature,” he thought; and then another thought quickly succeeded, “ I wonder if this new creature

is leaving behind her that prig of a sweetheart." A quizzical twist curled the corners of his lips at this thought.

"What are you laughing at, Mr. Rushton?"

He laughed outright at her question. "I doubt whether any one ever gave me credit for being the hilarious fellow that you do, Miss Harrison. How many times, I wonder, have you accused me of laughing, when nothing was further from my intention?"

"Because I suspect that you are laughing at me; that makes one sensitive."

"Oh! and you thought I was laughing at you just now?"

"Y-es; but I did n't mind as I used,—as I did at first."

"You've become accustomed to my impertinence in that direction, eh?"

"I've got more acquainted with you, and I see that you don't—"

“ Well, go on.”

“ That you don’t mean any disrespect.”

“ Disrespect! How tremendously serious that sounds! How could you have thought so seriously, any way, of the matter?”

She looked mortified. “ Perhaps it was silly of me; but” — flashing upon him with a sudden little spurt of temper — “ older people, specially men, *can* be so patronizing to younger people.”

“ Take care, you ’ll fall!” She had started to go on, and turned abruptly round a projecting corner of rock. For a second the hand he had flung out to steady her kept its hold upon her arm.

“ Wait a minute, that is not the way to go; you are out of the track. Here, this way.” He was smiling still, but she did not find fault with it; and presently, when he spoke again, still in a tone of badinage, she had no feeling of annoyance, no feeling that she was being patronized. How easy

the way grew after that first ascent, how sweet the air, and what a perfect day for the trip,—so perfect that it was almost a disappointment when she found the summit was gained.

“What! already?” she exclaimed.

“Does it seem so short a trip?”

“Yes, very; but it is so much easier than I thought.”

“Then you were so busily occupied in trying to pick a quarrel with me,” smiling down at her. “But look about you,—is n’t this worth while? There is the Canada border, and there is old Katahdin; and look at those peaks straight ahead—here, let me adjust the glass.” The wind at that height blew a strong steady current, and the light figure in turning about was blown forward towards the verge of the peak.

“Good Heavens, child! be careful.”

“How strong the wind is,—it takes

me off my feet. Oh, and my hat!” Involuntarily she flung both hands out as she spoke. Another gust of wind buffeted her; she tried to regain her footing; for the first time a little sense of terror overcame her,—something swam before her eyes, her head reeled, but it was only for a moment. She was safe in an instant,—perfectly safe in the strong grasp of her companion.

“What! you are not frightened? There is no danger. Stand still a minute and look toward the sky. There, you are all right? Now turn the glass to the left while I steady you. If I let go my hold you will blow away after your hat, I’m afraid. Yes; that is Katahdin—there, straight before you. The climb is worth while, is n’t it?”

“Oh, yes, yes; and the day is so perfect.”

For a few minutes he stood without speaking; then he began talking with

rather unusual volubility. There was a strain of gayety running through everything that he said, but there was none of the satire that usually accompanied it; it was rather as if he had for the moment dropped at the foot of the mountain some cloud that had hitherto obscured him. Jessie responded to this happier state with an enjoyment she did not stop to question; but all at once her generous spirit recalled those that she had momentarily forgotten.

“Oh, if Helen could have come!” she exclaimed; “she will never have such another day. But perhaps she may come yet,—perhaps she is on the way.”

“Hardly. It is too late, and—time that we were going back.”

“So soon?” in a surprised tone.

“Yes, so soon.”

His hold upon the slender figure relaxed; his light volubility suddenly died out.

Their descent was easy and rapid ; but the sun was casting long slant shadows across the lake as they came to the foot of the mountain.

But where were the waiting party ?

“They have gone into the wood, round the bend there ; shout to them,” Jessie suggested.

Mr. Rushton pointed to the bank where the larger canoe had been.

“What ! they have n’t gone without us ?”

“It seems so,” replied Mr. Rushton. “But here — this will probably explain.” He went forward as he spoke, and picked up a piece of paper that was tied to the branch of a low-growing pine. It was a note for Jessie, written by Mr. Wainright on a leaf torn from his memorandum book. Evidently, though his wife had inspired it, she had not superintended the exact composition. The missive ran : —

"Helen says that she feels one of her headaches coming on, and insists upon our going back to camp at once. I am very sorry, but you will follow us as soon as you return.

"MARK."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jessie, with impatience. "Helen is the worst traveller I ever saw."

Mr. Rushton made no response. His genial mood had entirely disappeared. There had sprung up in his mind, full-statured, a suspicion that had been for some time lurking there.

"Poor Harry!" went on Jessie, as yet unobservant of this change of mood in her companion; "he will feel so cheated, so disappointed. If Helen had only left him to go with us, he would have been consoled. He would have been perfectly safe waiting by himself, but Helen gets so ridiculously nervous sometimes."

"She does not appear to be at all nervous

about *you*. She seems to have no doubts of your safety upon any occasion."

Jessie looked up at the speaker. His tone was harsh and mocking. What had come over him?

When he met that wide innocent gaze, James Rushton felt a sense of shame at his momentary outbreak. After a brief silence, she said deprecatingly,—

"Helen does not mean to be selfish, and she does not think she is neglecting me when she leaves me in your care or Mark's. She knows, of course, I am quite safe with either."

An oddly contradictory emotion here seized her listener; a disgusted sort of repugnance to be thus classed with Mark,—"that fat fool," as he contemptuously termed him. But he could not be sorry that the girl had so entirely misunderstood his irritable fling at her sister's conduct.

The evening was coming on rapidly as

they pushed out from the shore, the sunset colors fast merging in the dusk purples of twilight, while a young moon hung its silver crescent above them. Saddened and constrained, she knew not why, the girl sat, keenly observant of all this evening beauty, but with a feeling as if a door had suddenly been shut between herself and her companion.

Mrs. Wainright at that very moment was congratulating herself upon her finesse. “Opportunity, favorable opportunity,—there is nothing like it. The man will speak,—*has* spoken before this, I am certain. It was all there in his eyes; I saw it. He never can withstand Jessie’s charm on that long expedition; and Jessie—I am sure that Jessie has forgotten to lament John Goodwin long ago—long ago.”

It was a very short time after these triumphant conclusions, that, glancing up, the lady was taken greatly by surprise at

the appearance of Mr. Rushton himself, coming up the lake path. She was at that instant laughing very healthily and heartily at something her husband had been saying to her. The laugh died upon her lips and her ready wit deserted her as her "kind host" came forward.

"What! back so soon?" she had nearly cried.

He came straight toward her, looking like anything but a man who had been considering happy opportunities.

"Your anticipated headache, I take it, didn't come to time, Mrs. Wainright?" was his remark as he stood before her.

"No — yes — very much better, thank you," was the confused reply. Recovering herself with a swift coolness that was one of her strong points, Helen Wainright in the next instant was on the broad tide of easy generalities. It takes a great deal to convince women like her that their schemes

may become apparent to another. To her smooth comment and question so swiftly brought forth, he answered shortly, if not savagely, and as soon as possible turned and left her. A little later, as he came upon Jeremiah, that worthy exclaimed,—

“Oh, here you be! I calkerlated you ’d be kinder surprised when you found out we ’d cleared out and left ye.”

“What time did you leave?”

“Just a little spell after yer ’d started off up the mount’in. Mis’ Wainright took a notion she was a-goin’ to hev a headache, and nothin’ must do but we must put right off; and she ’s been as chipper as a cluckin’ hen ever since. I hain’t seen no sign of a headache. Women beat me, I vow!”

Mr. Rushton smiled grimly.

It needed but one glance at her sister to show Mrs. Wainright that her well-arranged plan for the day had fallen through. Nothing of joyful importance had occurred to

break the unconscious calm of that transparent face, that always reflected every emotion. Instead, there was a little look of wistful fatigue about the eyes and the mouth.

“The man is a slow conceited prig, but he is n’t going to shilly-shally round Jessie in this way much longer,” was the lady’s curious conclusion. Mrs. Wainright belonged to that by no means small class of persons who can quite comfortably and comfortingly deceive themselves sometimes. Morning brought no change to this and other conclusions which had shaped themselves in her mind, but it brought a change in the circumstances that was unlooked for. She rose late. Going out of her tent after a hasty toilette, she was surprised to see no one but Jessie. To her question as to the whereabouts of the others, she was told that Mark and Harry had gone fishing, and that Mr. Rushton was off before any one was up, according to Jeremiah.

“Off — where ?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure.”

“I don’t think they ought all to go away and leave us two women alone.”

“Why, Helen, Mark is within call of our whistle. You can hear Jeremiah talking if you go down the path.”

“I suppose Mr. Rushton has gone off on a moose-hunt with one of his beloved Indians.”

Jessie made no reply. She was apparently wholly absorbed in preparing her sister’s breakfast.

“To go off moose-hunting alone, some one told me at the hotel, was not very safe.”

“How absurd, Helen ! Nothing of that kind can be unsafe for an expert hunter.” Jessie had for a moment forgotten the coffee she was brewing.

Mrs. Wainright looked up tranquilly at the flushed face. She didn’t know any-

thing about it herself, of course. She could only tell what she had heard. Whereupon ensued a recital of disasters that was by no means enlivening. Resolutely, and somewhat defiantly, Jessie scouted at these tales as untrustworthy, ridiculous; but as her sister concluded, there was a red glow upon her cheeks which was not altogether the heat of the fire. Sipping her coffee composedly, Mrs. Wainright said to herself,—

“She cares more for him than I thought. I wish I dared to ask her a question or two, but it won’t do to make her conscious. One thing, however,—this man is not going to play with her affections.”

With this cool assumption of the situation, as she chose to have it, Mrs. Wainright went on with her breakfast and her plans. She was evidently impatient to bring on a crisis. Without her intervention a crisis that quite exceeded her expectations was

rapidly approaching; but no hint of it flashed along that electric line of nerves she prided herself upon possessing. "I always have a singular premonition when anything important is going to happen," was one of her favorite speeches. Jessie, on the contrary, who was not given to such fancies, listened to the soughing of the wind, as the night came on, with a perturbed spirit.

"There's goin' to be a storm," said Jeremiah, with confident decision.

"Did Mr. Rushton expect to take any one with him on his way, Jeremiah?" asked Mrs. Wainright.

"Not's I know of. He took his canoe and went by the lake. He can't hav picked up Injun Dave, for he's gone to Oldtown,—went yesterdays."

"Has he gone after moose?"

"I think likely he has. They're scarce now-a-days, but you *can* find 'em."

Mrs. Wainright brought forward her

lugubrious stories and asked Jeremiah's opinion. Did the coming storm affect Jeremiah's nerves that he gave heed to these sensational tales, instead of, as Jessie expected, at once scouting them as nonsensical? Leaning forward with a good deal of earnestness, he even added to Mrs. Wainright's store a legend or two of a like nature. And the storm crept on as he talked, stealthily at first, but presently gathering force and fury. When it broke, Mrs. Wainright, safe in the shelter of the cabin, was lamenting her quarters, and predicting all manner of accidents,—not the least of which was that they should probably, every one of them, be struck by the lightning.

“Sho!” ejaculated Jeremiah, who had taken shelter with the rest in the cabin, “*we ain’t in no danger; it’s them that’s out in it, that’ll get the wust of it.*”

Jessie could not ask questions like her

sister. The lugubrious stories that had been told, haunted her. She feared she knew not what. In every gust of wind, in every flash of lightning and peal of thunder, she seemed to hear, to see, premonitions of disaster. Falling asleep at last, from sheer exhaustion, her dreams were nightmares, — wild visions of storm and wreck in which she constantly saw one figure baffled and beaten, one figure that she always tried vainly to reach and to rescue. When morning dawned, the storm was over, the sky clear, and the sun shining. Mrs. Wainright's spirits rose. But Jessie saw Jeremiah look investigatingly into Mr. Rushton's tent.

“Has he come back?” she asked in a low tone.

“No; I reckoned he might hev come back 'fore we was up, for I kinder thought he 'd hev said, if he meant to make a long trip.”

“Do you think anything could have happened, Jeremiah?”

“No, I don’t, unless he was a darned fool, and started off in his canoe thinkin’ to get ahead of the tempest; but he ain’t no fool o’ that kind, I’m certain.”

There was a suggestion of doubt in this answer, which did not tend to reassure Jessie.

Occupied with their various affairs, the rest of the party did not appear to concern themselves much about the absent one; but as the second day began to close and he did not appear, Mark began to express some wonder and apprehension.

Jeremiah made little response. Once he said meditatively,—

“I guess he kin take care of himself. He ought to know how by this time.”

Harry at last grew voluble in his wonder, and his suggestions of accident. Gradually the boy’s anxiety seemed to affect

the rest in some measure ; and when at length he proposed that they should go down the lake on a trip of investigation, nobody opposed it, though Jeremiah affected to treat the whole matter unconcernedly.

Mrs. Wainright saw them depart with inward misgivings as to her own comfort and safety. She was constantly expecting bears and burglars when the masculine members of her party were out of her sight. Jessie, on the other hand, felt a thrill of relief and satisfaction.

“ I ’ll blow my whistle if we catch any track of him,” shouted back Harry, as they started off.

Slowly the moments drifted by. The sky began to glow red with sunset, then the cool tints of approaching evening came on. The vireo lifted his piping strain, and somewhere in the darkening shade a belated thrush sent out a timid note ; but Jessie listened in vain for Harry’s cheerful signal.



CHAPTER VI.

“I do think,” began Mrs. Wainright, querulously, as the twilight deepened — But hark! what was that? — voices? Had they returned? Was that Harry speaking in that strange, excited tone? and, yes, that was Jeremiah, and he was saying, —

“He must have started off to come back, and the tempest struck him.”

In a moment more, Mark and Harry and Jeremiah were in sight. Harry ran to his mother and commenced to speak, but burst into tears instead.

Jessie stood a little apart, with dilated eyes. What were they saying? They had seen the canoe drifting along the lake,

and it was empty ; and floating nearer to them his hat,—the hat he wore,—and they had brought it back, and not—not—

It seemed to Jessie, all at once, as if a dozen voices were confusedly mingling together. Then somebody asked a question, and Mark answered in a subdued tone, but it sounded like a trumpet tone to Jessie,—

“It is of no use, he must have gone down last night when the storm first struck him.”

Nobody paid any attention to Jessie at this crisis. They were all absorbed in one all-absorbing subject. Even Mrs. Wainright forgot her watchfulness. Gradually their voices ceased. Mark and Harry and Jeremiah went off together towards the empty tent. Then Mrs. Wainright, for the first time, looked for Jessie ; but she had disappeared, and her sister was not sorry. She felt that to confront her face at that

moment would have been beyond her endurance. But Jessie had not withdrawn herself far. Dizzy, confused, half stunned, she had turned away from the glare of the firelight into the shadow. Flinging herself down among the hemlock boughs, she tried to shut out the terrible vision that presented itself to her,—tried to forget—to forget—the dreadful world where death mocked pitilessly at life. As she lay there she vaguely heard the returning footsteps of Mark and Harry; and awhile after her sister's voice had reached her dull ear, and she had answered it, marvelling at her own far-sounding tones. Then she heard Jeremiah softly moving about the falling fire, banking it up here and there; then as softly she heard him move away, and presently there was a hush, when no sounds but those of the forest disturbed her, and she knew that every one save herself had found forgetfulness in sleep.

She took no heed of time as she lay there. It might have been long or brief, for what she knew. At last the stinging sense of pain seemed to slip away. She no longer heard the whirl of the rapids, the crying of the loon. Was it a moment or more that she thus lost that dread consciousness of death, and of life itself? And coming back, what quickened sense set all her faculties alert and tingling with expectation of something yet to come,—some dread and dear presence,—something that was, and was not —

She had lifted herself up ; she was standing facing the clearing. The red glow of the fire cast a lurid light ; and in that light, clear and distinct, she saw his face — *his face*, the eyes bent upon her as if in questioning,—as if she were the pallid ghost, not he,—*she*, with her white, haggard, woful countenance. Mechanically she moved forward, her lips apart but speechless.

“What is it? What has happened? What is the matter?” she heard a voice inquire in low concerned accents.

She flung out her hands; a dry, tearless sob fluttered from her lips.

“Oh, is it you — is it you — and — you are not dead?”

“I am certainly not dead, as you see.”

“They found your boat on the lake.”

“And they thought — you thought I was drowned. Good Heavens!”

“And you are not — you are here — living, living!” she cried, a tremulous note of joy thrilling her voice.

He caught the outflung hands to steady her wavering movement; he caught also the dawning rapture in her eyes, and in one instant the whole situation was clear to him,—the secret of her heart laid bare. He must have been something more or less than man not to have been moved from his long-held restraint in that in-

stant. Her great suffering in all these hours was written upon her deathly face; and this suffering was for him. The swift rapture of relief,—that also was for him. For one moment— one blind forgetting moment—he yielded to an overmastering impulse, and strained her to his breast, murmuring some half-inarticulate words of passion and tenderness.

When in another moment he released her, he faced the world in the person of Mrs. Wainright, who was coming towards them. Waking from a brief sleep, she had looked to find her sister in her cabin cot, and, alarmed to see it empty, had flung on her blanket-wrapper, and started out in search of her. At the cabin door she had first caught sight of the man she thought was lying drowned in Moosehead Lake. Whatever shock she had experienced then, she had had time to recover from. One glance at the lady's eyes, and James Rush-

ton knew that she had witnessed the scene that had just transpired. Too overcome, too happy to meet question in any form, to bear the presence of another even, Jessie had fled at the approach of her sister. There was a second of silence, when Mrs. Wainright, left alone with Mr. Rushton, waited for him to speak. The silence was broken by an exclamation from Jeremiah, who had been aroused out of his first nap. Mark presently appearing, exclamations and interrogations followed thick and fast. The answer to all these was very simple.

The canoe had been left on the bank by its owner with the intention of returning by the lake. The storm rendering that impossible, the small tent carried in the canoe had been pitched for shelter.

“But your hat — it was the gray felt you always wear ?” put in Mark.

“Yes; but I left it behind me in the

canoe, as I was going into some low-growing woods, and I thought my cap would be more convenient."

Jeremiah looked thoroughly disgusted with himself and his companions. He gave a sort of snort by way of preliminary, and then,—

"I told 'em I thought likely you'd lived long enough to take care of yourself, 'fore we started; but the storm and all kinder upset the boy, and nothin' must do but we must go and try to hunt yer up. I kinder give in when we found yer hat, for I knowed 't was no use to say anything then,— they were bound to hev yer to the bottom o' Moosehead, anyway."

Mr. Rushton, looking up, met Mark's eyes; and as Jeremiah, with a generally disappointed air, stalked away, the two men exchanged an amused smile. Directly after, Mark noticed the weary look upon his companion's face.

“ You’ve had a tedious trip,” he remarked.

“ Yes, as things have turned out — very.”

“ Moose-hunting ? ”

“ Yes ; and unsuccessful.”

“ Well, I think we’re all pretty well tired out, and I move that we turn in.”

Rushton, for the first time since he had met Mark, felt a sentiment of cordiality towards him. He had given him a few hours’ escape from Mrs. Wainright,—a few hours to think over the new position in which he found himself, and to determine upon his future action. With a muttered “ Good-night,” and a hasty “ Make my apologies to the ladies,”—this latter ceremony of speech rather astonishing Mark,—he took himself off without further ceremony.

It was late the next morning, as camp hours go, when he came out of his tent.

Jeremiah, who was the only person in sight, glanced up as he was passing. Something that the shrewd backwoodsman observed riveted his attention.

“Yer ain’t sick, air yer?”

“No,” with a surprised inflection.

“Well, yer don’t look’s if ye’d slep’ much. Seems as if *somethin’*’s baound to happen. Last night we got most ready to go to a funeral, and this mornin’ Mis’ Wainright’s sister’s down, and Mr. Wainright’s gone up to the hotel for a doctor.”

“Mrs. Wainright’s sister? What is the matter?”

“I dunno, and I don’t think ennybody does. My opinion is, she’s been upset. She was ruther peakèd when she fust come, and this day or two’s scare hes been too much for her. Mis’ Wainright, she told a lot of stories of dretful accidents, ’nuff to make yer hair stan’ on end, just afore the storm

set in, and then they got ye drownded, and altogether it's upset her."

Jeremiah entirely ignored *his* share in the "dretful accident" recital.

His listener did not wait to hear further, but at once bent his steps towards the cabin.

Mrs. Wainright met him at the door. Her face showed anxiety and alarm. Jessie had wakened early in the morning, she told him, from a troubled sleep, restless and feverish. Within the last hour the fever had increased, and she began to talk incoherently. As Mrs. Wainright was speaking the girl's voice broke out, as if from sleep,—

"Why do they give him up so soon, so soon?" Then, in a more natural tone, "Helen, Helen!"

"Yes, Jessie, I am coming."

"If there is anything I can do—" began Mr. Rushton.

“Helen, Helen!”

Mrs. Wainright hastened away without another word.

“She has had some shock to the nerves and some sudden chill,” the doctor said at once.

Mrs. Wainright told the story of their two days’ anxiety and alarm about one of their party, without mentioning Mr. Rushton’s name or specializing Jessie’s peculiar interest. But she could not account for the chill,—she knew nothing of that agonized vigil under the dark shadows of the hemlocks.

The doctor was a new hotel acquaintance of Mrs. Wainright, whom they had been glad to find in the absence of the older physician who had attended Harry. He was a lively, sociable fellow, who came and went evidently on the best terms with himself; but he performed his professional duty with skill and care, and in twenty-four hours his

patient was decidedly mending. In these hours there had been so much anxiety and occupation that Mrs. Wainright had found no opportunity for a conversation with Mr. Rushton. But that could wait. She had no anxiety in that direction now. In the mean while the conduct of their "kind host" was irreproachable,—grave, courteous, and thoughtful in his inquiries and proffers of assistance.

It was the next morning after the twenty-four hours had culminated in such relief, that the doctor, in leaving the cabin, happened for the first time during his visits to catch sight of Mr. Rushton, who was just then coming up the lake path to his tent. The lively practitioner was in the full tide of congratulations concerning his patient's recovery,—Jessie was already sitting up, and only waiting for the sun to be a little higher to venture out.

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Wainright," began

the doctor, "I think now that everything is —"

Mrs. Wainright looked up to ascertain the reason for the abrupt cessation of the doctor's speech. Following the direction of his eyes, she felt herself enlightened.

"Oh, you are acquainted with Mr. Rushton ?" she asked briskly.

Instead of reply came the question,—

"Is *he* one of your camp neighbors ?"

"Well, I think I may say that he is something more than that. We are really in a way his guests." And Mrs. Wainright related their earlier experience.

"He looks better than he did five or six years ago ; I have n't seen him in about that time, I believe. I heard he 'd gone abroad to live, and I thought it was a very wise plan." This was said in a meditative tone, but with a look of absorbed attention directed towards the tall erect figure in the distance.

"Do you know Mr. Rushton ?"

“ Know him ? Yes, I know him, as the world knows him, by sight. He’s a fine-looking fellow, but he’s much stouter than he was. I saw him first when he was on his trial — let me see, that is fifteen years ago. He was a young man then — twenty-five or six ; he’s about my age. He was at that time one of the handsomest men in New York.”

“ On his trial ! What in the world do you mean, Doctor ? ”

The doctor turned an amazed glance upon his companion. Then, moving a few paces away, — they were standing almost in the doorway of the cabin, — he repeated her words, —

“ What do I mean ? Do *you* mean, Mrs. Wainright, that you don’t know what — who this is ? ”

“ No ! no ! ”

“ Well, to be sure, you were too young then to remember ; but your husband — ”

“Mr. Wainright was in South America fifteen years ago. We have only lived in New York for the last five years. But what is it? Tell me. What has he done? What was he on trial for?”

“He killed a man,—a man by the name of George Chauncey; he was his business partner,—they were importers,—a new firm, both men of good families. Some quarrel arose one night, and Rushton gave the lie to Chauncey, and accused him of dishonest transactions,—threatened to expose him. They had a violent altercation, and in it Rushton struck an unlucky blow. This was all that at first came up; but there was a woman mixed up with it. Chauncey was a bad fellow, there was no doubt about that, and he tried to intimidate Rushton when he found he would not be governed by him in the business matter by threatening him in that direction. Rushton was a hot-headed, imperious fellow, and that was too much for him.”

“Who was the woman?”

“A society woman,—Mrs. Darrell. There was nothing, after all, but foolishness in that affair,—enormous vanity on the woman’s part, that led him on to make an idiot of himself. There were some unfortunate meetings which Chauncey had got hold of, and which Rushton thought would fatally compromise the lady. The trial was the talk of the day for months.”

“And he was acquitted?”

“No; he was convicted of manslaughter, and condemned to serve a term of five years in the State’s prison. Family influence, however, abridged it to three. He did go abroad, I believe, immediately after his release; but some death in his father’s family brought him back. He has never attempted active business since, and has lived in a very retired way, out of the world, and out of society entirely.”

“A criminal in the State’s prison for three years—this man—this man that

we have trusted, that we have made a friend of—that we have—”

“Don’t excite yourself, Mrs. Wainright, I beg.”

“Excite myself! Oh, if you knew!”





CHAPTER VII.

TEN minutes after this the doctor was on his way back to the hotel, and Mrs. Wainright was walking rapidly past the row of pines and hemlocks towards Mr. Rushton's tent. As she approached she saw him standing not far from the opening, absorbed in reading a letter. At sight of that proud-set head, that attitude of confident composure, the little humiliations that she had suffered now and then from the ill-concealed contempt of this man stung her anew, and gave venom to her passion. Blinded by this passion, she went forward to meet him.

“Mr. Rushton!”

The moment he looked at her he knew that something was amiss, and motioned her to enter the tent. She did not leave him long in suspense as to what it was. With headlong, irrelevant speed she poured forth her words, her voice trembling with fury at her concluding sentence,—

“To become our companion like this—to win my sister’s affections as if there were no obstacle—as if you were the most honorable gentleman—”

His voice, hard and dominant, broke in upon her:—

“As I have endeavored to be,—as I should have been up to the last but for you, madam! Now it is my turn; listen to me. You talk of my becoming your companion. Did I invite myself to your camping-ground? Did I seek the society of any of your party after accident brought you here? How many times did I refuse to accept your advances? How many times

did you account me a churlish fellow for doing so? I have understood you and your designs for some time. You know what they are,—I do not need to state them."

"What do you mean?" she demanded with a bold assumption of ignorance.

He gave a short scornful laugh.

"I mean, madam, since you will have me speak, that it has been perfectly clear to me that without the most ordinary credentials from any acquaintance, you have *designed* me, a perfect stranger, to win your sister's favor. You have disregarded every conventionality in attempting to throw us together in pursuance of your project, regardless of *my* possible opinion of such unconventionality, and how it might also affect your sister. You complacently thought yourself worldly-wise, and I was an eligible man in the light of that wisdom. Don't interrupt me. You talk of criminality,—you talk of honor! What could be more crim-

inal than this conduct of yours ? I bore an old name ; I was an aristocrat, you thought, and probably a man of some wealth. That I might have smirched that name,—that I might be a libertine, a gambler, a thorough *roué*,—you did not take pains to ascertain ; for if I was all of these, and in society, as you fondly believed, I was still worthy, in your estimation, of that innocent child. I have never taken the slightest advantage of the opportunities that you have allowed me. I have never sought the companionship of any of your party. I have accepted it at times because I could not well do otherwise. But if I had foreseen that your sister could have—been disturbed by me, I would long ago have left you in full possession of my camp ; but, until last night, I had no suspicion that I —”

“ But I saw—I saw—” The bold assumption of Mrs. Wainright was beginning to falter, and her voice broke hysterically.

“ Yes, I know — I was taken by surprise. I forgot for an instant that I had no right — even to my own.”

His voice lost all its hardness as he uttered these last words ; and drawing a deep breath, he wheeled shortly about, with the evident intention of leaving the tent. But suddenly he started back, and over his face came such a change that Mrs. Wainright involuntarily turned to see the cause of it.

“ Jessie ! ”

The girl put up her hand to enjoin silence. At the movement the two who were regarding her noticed the resolute expression that she wore.

“ I have heard all,—everything,” she began. “ I was not asleep when the doctor told his story, Helen, and I followed you here. It is not what he told that makes the difference to me ; it is what you have said to Mr. Rushton that makes all the

launch a toy craft he had brought with him, and in the distance the voices of her sister and Mr. Rushton, mingling together in a very sociable manner, reached her ears. In a few minutes the two came in sight, the gentleman carrying an oddly shaped bundle over his shoulder, traveller fashion.

“Holloa! what have you got there?” shouted Mark.

Mr. Rushton laughed a little as he flung his pack down, and explained that they had found some young balsam-pines unexpectedly, and he had improvised a bag for Miss Harrison out of his light tweed overcoat, which he had fortunately put in the canoe.

Mrs. Wainright looked at the face that had turned so grimly upon her an hour ago, then at the trim tweed overcoat rolled into a shapeless mass, and thought of Mr. Arbuton and the heedlessness with which

he had sacrificed a similar garment upon a less peaceful occasion. At the glance, at the thought, a light sparkle — it might have been at the recollection invoked, it might have been some present triumphant conclusion — shone in her eyes.

“And there are ferns here, Helen, just here a step or two back,” exclaimed Jessie.

“Ferns!” and Mrs. Wainright was all animation.

“Now, don’t waste your strength at the start, Helen,” warned her husband, as he saw the energy with which his wife turned to follow Jessie’s suggestion.

But Mrs. Wainright knew quite well what she was about, and the extent and limit of her strength much better than her husband did.

“Just a step or two back,” Jessie had said; but step by step Mrs. Wainright led her husband a fine chase as he danced attendance upon her. “Only one fern

more," or "I must see what variety this is," etc., until Mark's patience began to give out. "But Helen came down from the hotel to please me, and I ought to let her enjoy herself as she chooses. This is her picnic, not mine," he reasoned with himself.

Presently, however, he drew a sigh of relief, as Jessie came forward to urge that there should be no more delay in going up the mountain.

Mrs. Wainright turned a flushed and wearied face towards her sister, and sitting down in an exhausted manner, began to fan herself with her hat.

Mark gave a little growl half under his breath.

"She's tired herself out, as I thought she would," he exclaimed disgustedly.

"I do feel tired," admitted Mrs. Wainright, "and I don't believe I had better try to go just yet; but that is no reason for delaying anybody else,—no reason for your

not setting out at once, Jessie. Then, a little later, if I feel rested, we will come after you ; if not, we will wait for you here."

" Well, if we are to go, we ought to go at once, Mr. Rushton says. Come, Harry !" called Jessie, moving off.

" Oh, Jessie, I don't think Harry ought to go. He doesn't seem so strong as I thought he was,—not strong enough for climbing."

Harry broke forth into vigorous protest.

For a few minutes there was a sharp conflict, which ended at last in Mrs. Wainright's victory ; her final neat little sentence, delivered in a plaintive tone, carrying the day, —

" The doctor told me, when I left the hotel, on no account to allow Harry to take any violent exercise."

And thus it came about that Jessie went up the mountain alone with Mr. Rushton.



CHAPTER V.

THE ascent at the start and for some little distance up Mount Kineo is steep enough to preclude anything like conversation. After that, the way is irregular and easy, coming now and then upon lovely places where one can rest and take breath of the sweet air, in little shaded nooks and thickets. Quick, and sure of foot, Jessie began to enjoy herself thoroughly as they went on. Her companion, too, seemed to throw off for the time whatever mood may have been out of harmony with the perfect spot and the perfect day. The petty atmosphere which Mrs. Wainright always somehow brought with her

presence vanished as they got into that upper air.

“ You would win the approval of Indian Dave himself for your powers of climbing,” was a commendation that Jessie specially appreciated from so skilled a woodsman as Mr. Rushton. They had come to the first resting-place as he said this; and the girl’s face, bright and sparkling, offered distinct contrast to the pale, hollow-eyed creature of a few weeks ago.

“ What is it you are thinking of ? ” she asked, as she met his critical glance.

“ I was thinking how well you are looking. Camp life seems to agree with you.”

“ It does. I haven’t felt so well for years,—not since I was a child. I feel like a new creature.”

“ She *looks* like a new creature,” he thought; and then another thought quickly succeeded, “ I wonder if this new creature

is leaving behind her that prig of a sweetheart." A quizzical twist curled the corners of his lips at this thought.

"What are you laughing at, Mr. Rushton?"

He laughed outright at her question. "I doubt whether any one ever gave me credit for being the hilarious fellow that you do, Miss Harrison. How many times, I wonder, have you accused me of laughing, when nothing was further from my intention?"

"Because I suspect that you are laughing at me; that makes one sensitive."

"Oh! and you thought I was laughing at you just now?"

"Y-es; but I did n't mind as I used,—as I did at first."

"You've become accustomed to my impertinence in that direction, eh?"

"I've got more acquainted with you, and I see that you don't—"

“ Well, go on.”

“ That you don’t mean any disrespect.”

“ Disrespect! How tremendously serious that sounds! How could you have thought so seriously, any way, of the matter?”

She looked mortified. “ Perhaps it was silly of me; but” — flashing upon him with a sudden little spurt of temper — “ older people, specially men, *can* be so patronizing to younger people.”

“ Take care, you ’ll fall!” She had started to go on, and turned abruptly round a projecting corner of rock. For a second the hand he had flung out to steady her kept its hold upon her arm.

“ Wait a minute, that is not the way to go; you are out of the track. Here, this way.” He was smiling still, but she did not find fault with it; and presently, when he spoke again, still in a tone of badinage, she had no feeling of annoyance, no feeling that she was being patronized. How easy

the way grew after that first ascent, how sweet the air, and what a perfect day for the trip,—so perfect that it was almost a disappointment when she found the summit was gained.

“What! already?” she exclaimed.

“Does it seem so short a trip?”

“Yes, very; but it is so much easier than I thought.”

“Then you were so busily occupied in trying to pick a quarrel with me,” smiling down at her. “But look about you,—is n’t this worth while? There is the Canada border, and there is old Katahdin; and look at those peaks straight ahead—here, let me adjust the glass.” The wind at that height blew a strong steady current, and the light figure in turning about was blown forward towards the verge of the peak.

“Good Heavens, child! be careful.”

“How strong the wind is,—it takes

me off my feet. Oh, and my hat!" Involuntarily she flung both hands out as she spoke. Another gust of wind buffeted her; she tried to regain her footing; for the first time a little sense of terror overcame her,—something swam before her eyes, her head reeled, but it was only for a moment. She was safe in an instant,—perfectly safe in the strong grasp of her companion.

"What! you are not frightened? There is no danger. Stand still a minute and look toward the sky. There, you are all right? Now turn the glass to the left while I steady you. If I let go my hold you will blow away after your hat, I'm afraid. Yes; that is Katahdin — there, straight before you. The climb is worth while, is n't it?"

"Oh, yes, yes; and the day is so perfect."

For a few minutes he stood without speaking; then he began talking with

rather unusual volubility. There was a strain of gayety running through everything that he said, but there was none of the satire that usually accompanied it; it was rather as if he had for the moment dropped at the foot of the mountain some cloud that had hitherto obscured him. Jessie responded to this happier state with an enjoyment she did not stop to question; but all at once her generous spirit recalled those that she had momentarily forgotten.

“ Oh, if Helen could have come ! ” she exclaimed ; “ she will never have such another day. But perhaps she may come yet,—perhaps she is on the way.”

“ Hardly. It is too late, and—time that we were going back.”

“ So soon ? ” in a surprised tone.

“ Yes, so soon.”

His hold upon the slender figure relaxed ; his light volubility suddenly died out.

Their descent was easy and rapid ; but the sun was casting long slant shadows across the lake as they came to the foot of the mountain.

But where were the waiting party ?

“They have gone into the wood, round the bend there ; shout to them,” Jessie suggested.

Mr. Rushton pointed to the bank where the larger canoe had been.

“What ! they have n’t gone without us ?”

“It seems so,” replied Mr. Rushton. “But here—this will probably explain.” He went forward as he spoke, and picked up a piece of paper that was tied to the branch of a low-growing pine. It was a note for Jessie, written by Mr. Wainright on a leaf torn from his memorandum book. Evidently, though his wife had inspired it, she had not superintended the exact composition. The missive ran :—

"Helen says that she feels one of her headaches coming on, and insists upon our going back to camp at once. I am very sorry, but you will follow us as soon as you return.

"MARK."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jessie, with impatience. "Helen is the worst traveller I ever saw."

Mr. Rushton made no response. His genial mood had entirely disappeared. There had sprung up in his mind, full-statured, a suspicion that had been for some time lurking there.

"Poor Harry!" went on Jessie, as yet unobservant of this change of mood in her companion; "he will feel so cheated, so disappointed. If Helen had only left him to go with us, he would have been consoled. He would have been perfectly safe waiting by himself, but Helen gets so ridiculously nervous sometimes."

"She does not appear to be at all nervous

about *you*. She seems to have no doubts of your safety upon any occasion."

Jessie looked up at the speaker. His tone was harsh and mocking. What had come over him?

When he met that wide innocent gaze, James Rushton felt a sense of shame at his momentary outbreak. After a brief silence, she said deprecatingly,—

"Helen does not mean to be selfish, and she does not think she is neglecting me when she leaves me in your care or Mark's. She knows, of course, I am quite safe with either."

An oddly contradictory emotion here seized her listener; a disgusted sort of repugnance to be thus classed with Mark,—"that fat fool," as he contemptuously termed him. But he could not be sorry that the girl had so entirely misunderstood his irritable fling at her sister's conduct.

The evening was coming on rapidly as

they pushed out from the shore, the sunset colors fast merging in the dusk purples of twilight, while a young moon hung its silver crescent above them. Saddened and constrained, she knew not why, the girl sat, keenly observant of all this evening beauty, but with a feeling as if a door had suddenly been shut between herself and her companion.

Mrs. Wainright at that very moment was congratulating herself upon her finesse. “Opportunity, favorable opportunity,—there is nothing like it. The man will speak,—*has* spoken before this, I am certain. It was all there in his eyes; I saw it. He never can withstand Jessie’s charm on that long expedition; and Jessie—I am sure that Jessie has forgotten to lament John Goodwin long ago—long ago.”

It was a very short time after these triumphant conclusions, that, glancing up, the lady was taken greatly by surprise at

the appearance of Mr. Rushton himself, coming up the lake path. She was at that instant laughing very healthily and heartily at something her husband had been saying to her. The laugh died upon her lips and her ready wit deserted her as her "kind host" came forward.

"What! back so soon?" she had nearly cried.

He came straight toward her, looking like anything but a man who had been considering happy opportunities.

"Your anticipated headache, I take it, didn't come to time, Mrs. Wainright?" was his remark as he stood before her.

"No — yes — very much better, thank you," was the confused reply. Recovering herself with a swift coolness that was one of her strong points, Helen Wainright in the next instant was on the broad tide of easy generalities. It takes a great deal to convince women like her that their schemes

and *aplomb* quite naturally recurred to the doctor as he confronted the childish apprehensions of some of the Neapolitans. It was after a flagrant exhibition of this childishness that he said to a gentleman,—a friend who had accompanied him from Rome,—

“I met a countrywoman of yours this afternoon, whose courage and calmness could teach these poor creatures a lesson.”

“A countrywoman of mine ?”

“Yes ; a girl not out of her twenties.”
And he related his interview with the young Signorina at the hotel.

His companion listened politely, but without special interest, puffing away all the while at his cigar. When the two presently turned the corner of the street that led to Maruccia’s, a messenger rushed hastily towards them and thrust a note into the physician’s hands.

“Well, this is what you would call, in

your language, ‘a singular coincidence,’” cried the doctor. “Here is a summons from the Signorina of whom I have just been telling you—no; not a cholera case—the elder lady has had a violent hemorrhage.” And he held out the note as he spoke.

A sudden and marvellous change came over the other’s face as he caught sight of the handwriting and signature of this note. “You have guessed rightly that the Signorina is a countrywoman of mine,” he cried.

“What! is she also an acquaintance?” asked the doctor.

“She is a — dear friend. I will go with you. I may be of service.”

The doctor was destined to a series of surprises that day. After his professional duties to the invalid had been discharged, and what relief was possible had been administered, he handed his friend’s card with a

few words of explanation to the Signorina, and saw the same change in her expression which had so surprised him upon the face of his companion a few minutes before.

“What! is he downstairs,—this gentleman?” she asked in quick, startled accents.

“He is downstairs, Signorina, waiting to see you. He was with me, as I have explained, when your note arrived; and when he saw the name he came with me, thinking he might be of service.”

“Yes, oh, yes, I will see him—at once.”

“I will send him to you, Signorina; for myself, I can do no more at present.” And with an “Addio,” the good doctor hastened from the little salon, leaving the Signorina striving to regain her lost composure.

A few moments passed thus; then there came a light tap on the door, to which she

was enabled to respond with reasonable calmness. In another moment the door swung open ; and, face to face, stood the two who had parted five years ago under a canvas tent in the Maine woods of America.

An unexpected meeting after a long separation is never just what the fancy has painted it. It may be a great joy, but nothing transpires exactly as one has dreamed. In her dreams of this meeting, Jessie had always spoken the rapture that was in her heart. In reality, she went forward almost mechanically, and shook hands with her visitor in the most commonplace fashion. In the same fashion the silence of five years was at first broken.

Then with a look that she scarcely understood, for she was not aware how these five years had transformed her into a woman whose self-possessed dignity impressed every beholder, he said,—

“I am glad to see you looking so well, but

it is a great risk for you to be here in Naples.
Is it your sister — is *she* your invalid ?”

“ Helen ? Ah ! you do not know ?”

“ No — I know nothing.”

“ My sister is dead. She was never very strong, and the winter after we — were in Maine, she took a severe cold from which she never recovered. When, directly after, it was thought best to place Harry at a boarding-school, Mrs. Lee, one of Helen’s acquaintances, proposed that I should become her travelling companion. She has been a dear friend to me, but I fear I am to lose her soon.”

The quiet control wavered a little here. The anxiety, the strange unexpectedness of the present situation, was breaking in upon her resolute composure. Noting these signs of disturbance, her companion began to speak in a matter-of-course way of his own movements, — his arrival in Rome at the beginning of the season, his renewal of

his acquaintance with Dr. Benoni, whom he had first met years ago in America, and his final decision to accompany him upon his present tour of investigation. Nothing could have been more conducive to restore and reassure his listener. To hear his voice alone was a tonic to her nerves; and when presently a summons from the sick-room interrupted him, and he said to her as he rose to go, "I shall look in upon you again to-night, for you may need some service," it seemed as if the old days in the far-off woods of Maine had come back again.

For the next two days the patient needed constant care and attention, and Jessie found little time to bestow upon herself, her hopes or her fears. By the third day the stifling air of the city lifted a little as a light wind blew down to them from the hills, and the sufferer began to rally so perceptibly that in a few hours' time all immediate danger was felt to be averted.

This breath of purer air, however, did not reach the lower portion of the city, and the victims of cholera multiplied rapidly. By the 6th of September the pestilence raged with such fury that messages were despatched in various directions for fresh physicians and attendants. Late on the afternoon of the 6th, Dr. Benoni paid a hasty visit to Mrs. Lee. As he passed out through the little salon, he stopped for a moment.

“Signorina, I have a message for you,” he began.

Jessie looked up with a quick throb of apprehension.

“My friend wished me to say to you that he may not now be able to look in upon you as he has been doing. You do not know, perhaps; but the cholera is greatly on the increase, and we have a distressing lack of attendance. Signor Rushton has nobly offered his services in this extremity, and I

have just left him in the discharge of his duties."

"Is he—at one of the hospitals?"

"Yes, Signorina."

A deathly chill seemed to settle about the heart of his listener. She had borne silence and separation, and been not all unblessed or unhappy, for somewhere upon the face of the earth he from whom she had been parted, had lived and loved her during these years. But now—now—to-morrow, today he might be no longer here—no longer in the world with her. Ah! she could not bear this. It was cruel—cruel. At this climax of thought she looked up, and met a glance at once comprehensive and compassionate.

"Signorina, it is not recklessness or hardihood that sends our friend into danger. Long ago in your own America I knew his sad history. If he faces death now to save life in this dire extremity that is before us,

can you not see, dear Signorina, that it is so best,—that if he lives he will in a measure have expiated, and that if he dies he has paid the great debt, the life for life? Ah, Signorina, already by his noble endeavors he seems to have stepped out of the shadows that had closed about him."

Slowly, one after another, the large tears forced themselves down the girl's white cheeks, but the deathly chill at her heart had relaxed its icy hold. At length, when she spoke, her voice, though firm, had a peculiar thrill in it.

"Tell him," she said, "that I bid him God speed to the end, whether it brings him back to me or sends him away from me forever."

The Italian's eyes filled with tears; and bending before her with profound deference, he murmured reverently,—

"It is not for me to invoke God's blessing upon one of His angels."



CHAPTER IX.

ON the afternoon of the 8th of September the streets of Naples, from the railroad station to the palace, rang with the enthusiastic cry, “Viva il secondo Padre della Patria!” as King Humbert, accompanied by his brother Amadeo, drove by in an open carriage on their way to the palace. All along the way flags were flying as if for a *festa*, and the faces of the populace were lighted up with a transport of feeling that recalled to some of the older spectators the day when Victor Emmanuel entered Rome as the liberator of Italy. The route of the royal travellers led directly past the hotel where our Americans were staying; and

Jessie, looking down from her balcony, felt her own heart thrilled and lifted by the fervent cry that rent the air. For more than forty-eight hours she had been a prey to the most consuming anxiety. Twice in that interval she had had news through Dr. Benoni of the one whom her thoughts followed constantly. He was well, though he was untiring in his services. This was the doctor's latest account; but five hours had elapsed since this account. In that time she had neither seen nor heard from the physician, and in that time she knew that the scourge was becoming every hour more virulent. Following the official bulletin, she saw that one of the Neapolitan physicians had succumbed to the disease while in the discharge of his duties, and that several of the assistants had been attacked, and one or more were supposed to be dying. It was while pondering upon these distressing casualties, and the special distress they might

involve for her, that that fervent shout, "Viva il secondo Padre della Patria," reached her. Leaning over the balcony and looking down upon the vivid Southern faces lighted up by enthusiasm, while again and again that fervid shout arose, she experienced something of the same *exalté* feeling that she had felt when Dr. Benoni had spoken so eloquently to her a few days ago. For the moment the swift, ghastly stealthiness of the disease no longer overpowered her imagination. The terrible loneliness also of the last five hours seemed broken. She was one of a great army as she looked there and listened,—in the thick of the battle to live or to die, or to give up more than life. As the procession disappeared down the street, and the shouts grew fainter in the distance, she went back to the little salon and flung herself upon her knees, Protestant though she was, before a picture of the Madonna. It was a copy of Fra

Bartolomeo's "Misericordia di Lucca," that beneficent face that is typical of all human sympathy. Yet it was not appeal or supplication for happiness, not a prayer that any dread doom might be averted, that was now stirring her soul, but rather that final relinquishment of all personal struggle which is not the outcome of despair but of acceptance. Some dumb and formless prayer she might have made for strength to live on in "worse than an empty world," if her forebodings were realized ; and she had come to that crisis when such a realization seemed the only possible end. Gradually, however, as she knelt there, her thoughts wandered back to an earlier time,—to her childhood when life promised so fair ; then to the girlhood when, suddenly bereft of both father and mother, she had turned to her sister for that support and stay that had so sadly failed her. All her life, as it now unrolled before her from that

early time until the present, was set thick with the shadows of disappointment and death. It was the lot of some to walk thus in the shadow,—a lot that no struggles, no desperate endeavors, availed to avoid. But, after all, was not the one great joy that had come to her, though set about with the darkest of her shadows, though accompanied by separation, though even now met by death itself,—was not this great joy a possession that was infinitely more than the vacant content of inexperience? This question suddenly confronting her was like an illumination. “Ah! whatever the end, this cannot be taken from me,” broke from her lips. Her own voice startled her as she spoke. She looked up. The late Neapolitan sunset was tingeing everything, and a red shaft of splendor streamed through the parted curtains to the doorway, and at the door some one was knocking imperatively for admittance. It was Antonio, with a

letter. The handwriting, though in pencil, was quickly recognizable, and the color leaped to her cheek at the sight of it. Ah! the end was not yet. Tearing the envelope open, this was what she read scrawled hastily upon a slip of paper:—

“Dr. Benoni has been attacked with the cholera. We hope to save him. If you are in need of a physician, send for Dr. Arzélio at the Palazzo Cassano. Will let you know of any change.”

“Faithfully yours,

“JAMES RUSHTON.”

Dr. Benoni, who had faced cholera in the East time after time, stricken down! This was frightful. What news would reach her next?

Slowly time drifted by. It was early evening when this message was brought, and hour by hour she waited for further information which might arrive.

“Will let you know of any change,” the

note ran, and changes came quickly with cholera patients.

Hour after hour, in which the night passed away, and morning dawned and deepened, and noonday came again without further word.

“If you need a physician, send for Dr. Arzélio,” she suddenly recalled. Her invalid was doing well, yet she would send for Dr. Arzélio nevertheless. *He* would be able to give her some information. But Antonio brought her back word that Dr. Arzélio had gone to visit a friend,—a physician, dying at one of the hospitals.

“Did you hear the physician’s name, Antonio?” she asked.

“No, Signorina; but I heard them say it was one of the doctors from Rome.”

Her heart sank. Then a great fear overtook her as the boy added,—

“They said the poor doctor had no one to care for him,—his nurse died in the

night. Ah! they have so many sick ones, so many dead and dying at the hospital, Signorina." And the lad crossed himself with a little quiver of terror. If the dreadful plague had smitten one of the great doctors from Rome, it might creep up to their fine hotel, he thought dismally. But had the Signorina any more orders? The Signorina did not hear his question. She had turned away and was standing quite still before the balcony window, looking out upon the matchless sky and the blue waters of the bay.

So the end had come at last. He had paid the great debt, the life for life, while ministering to his friend. It was the end she had been expecting for days, the end for which she thought herself fully prepared; but none the less did it now bring the shock of loss and desolation that death always brings, however we may suppose ourselves prepared. Then came the sting of regret

that is sure to follow. Oh, if but another brief half-hour had been vouchsafed her, that she might have spoken, have heard words that must now remain forever unspoken! Turning from the window, her eyes fell upon the beneficent face of the Madonna; and she thought of her vigil before it, her renunciation and resignation, with a thrill of wonder. He had been in the world with her when she knelt there, and now — where was he?

Before nightfall there was a very sensible change in the atmosphere. The sultry stillness was gone, and in its stead a soft cool breeze was blowing down from the hills. Mrs. Lee felt the reviving influence so strongly that she at once proposed that they should start for Sorrento the next morning. Hannah, the faithful English maid, frankly confessed her satisfaction at this proposal.

“It’ll do you a world of good, mem, and Miss Jessie, too; she is looking quite wore out.”

The invalid turned her languid eyes upon Jessie's face. The change the last few hours had made there startled her.

"My dear, you look like a ghost. How selfish an invalid becomes! *Why* did n't you tell me, Hannah? No; you are not going to do a thing. Hannah will see to what packing there is. Put on your bonnet and go out somewhere for a walk with that nice Lavinia for a companion; or, better still, take a carriage and drive for an hour. And, Jessie, can't you send for that friend of yours and Dr. Benoni's, to go with you? — it would be so much pleasanter and nicer for you."

Mrs. Lee could not see the tremor that passed over the girl's face, nor did she notice that the hurried "Thank you" was spoken with effort. Lying there upon her invalid couch, she had known little of what had been transpiring about her for the past ten days. All exciting topics had been

forbidden, and no hint of the cholera had reached her. She had not a doubt that anxiety and care for herself and the lack of outdoor exercise were the sole causes of her young companion's worn appearance.

"A drive out over the hills will set her up wonderfully," was the good lady's comfortable conclusion.

But Jessie was too restless to enter a carriage. She recognized the necessity, however, of seeking some change at once ; and with Lavinia for an attendant she went out for a walk across the pretty square on the next street.

"And perhaps the Signorina would like to go to the church just round the corner, where they are offering up prayers for the poor sick people," the Italian girl suggested, as they came out of one of the gateways.

Jessie heard the notes of the organ and the sweet Southern voices in an appealing chant borne down to them on the breeze,

and was quite willing to be led by Lavinia's suggestion.

The church was dimly lighted; only here and there a taper brought out the face of a pictured saint, or made deeper gloom of some far niche and doorway. As Jessie entered, the voice of a young priest, deep and sonorous and entirely free from the usual droning intonation, seemed to fill the whole building with its passionate entreaty and supplication. But the passion was not of fear, the entreaty was not of pain, but full of the ecstasy of spiritual obligation and acceptance. The words were old and familiar, but the ardor of the speaker infused into them the warmth and freshness that had first inspired them. The impressionable Neapolitans at once responded to this ardor, and, lifted out of their anxieties and terrors for the moment, seemed to become the living and breathing embodiment of the young priest's enthusiasm.

Now and then the flare of a light would bring out here and there a rapt face, the dark eyes shining with excitement. Then at intervals, as the sweet, sonorous voice went on, the breathless hush would be broken by a long quivering sigh of emotion, which ended in a half-articulate exclamation,—an exclamation of sympathy and of aspiration. When the choristers took up the burden of their song it seemed more like a song of triumph than of supplication. The dullest ear, the soberest sense, must have been impressed by this tide of feeling. How much more acutely, then, must a sensitive soul, rendered doubly sensitive by a great anguish, have been affected! To Jessie, for the time, it brought something of the same solace that had come to her when she had listened to the enthusiastic shouts of the populace a few days before. As then, the sense of loneliness fell away from her, and she felt herself one of a great army in

the thick of the battle. But battles are not fought without scars. When she came out of the church with Lavinia, the lights of the square streaming across her face revealed lines and shadows that had not been there a few days ago. The Italian girl, glancing up at that moment, crossed herself with a murmured word or two in which one could have heard the name of the Virgin. Later she said to Antonio,—

“Something has changed the Signorina. She does not look any longer like a girl; she has grown old, like the Mother of Sorrows.”

Instead of passing through the little salon, as was her usual custom when she entered Mrs. Lee’s apartment, Jessie betook herself that night straight to her friend’s room from the main corridor. The invalid was sitting up amongst her pillows, superintending Hannah’s deft packing. Both mistress and maid lifted their eyes as the door opened.

"My dear, you are like somebody's grandmother in that black wrap," Mrs. Lee exclaimed; "positively, it gives you a gray look. Drop it off, do, before you go into the next room. Your friend has been waiting for you there for ten or fifteen minutes."

"My friend!"

"Yes; it was a pity you did n't find him to drive with you."





CHAPTER X.

THE black mantle with its lace hood slipped to the floor.

“Let me brush your hair, mem, before you go into the parlor,—the hood has pulled it all rough,” suggested the maid. But as she started up to perform the service, Jessie turned abruptly away, going out by the corridor as she had entered. One moment she stood outside, blind and dizzy. Her friend—her friend! Oh, it could not be! But in a moment more, gathering up her resolution, she crossed the corridor and opened the door of the salon. The little salon was well lighted,

and this light fell full upon her as she went forward.

The ordinary words of greeting that rose to her visitor's lips were forgotten as he came towards her. Good Heavens! how changed she looked! It was the same change that had startled Lavinia.

"You have been ill!" he exclaimed, pity, tenderness, and alarm vibrating in his voice.

"No, no,—not ill; but I have spent all my strength in these dreadful days, for I thought you had gone away from me again and forever—all my strength—I have no more left to endure with. If you leave me now—if you leave me now—" Her voice faltered and fell; her slight figure swayed unsteadily; she put out her hands blindly, gropingly, with an indescribable movement of supplication that went to her listener's heart, that broke down all his stoical reserves, that scattered all his stern resolutions to the winds.

“Jessie, Jessie, my poor darling, look at me! See,” he cried passionately, as he caught the swaying figure in his arms, “I am here; I will never leave you—never, never again, while I live!”

A month after this, a gentleman and lady came down from Sorrento to Naples on their way to Palermo. They were met at the station by a pale slender man, with an unmistakable Italian appearance.

“Jessie, see, here is Dr. Benoni,—he has come down from Rome to accompany us to Palermo.”

“How kind—and you are looking so well, Doctor.”

“And you, Signorina,—I beg your pardon, Signora,—let me congratulate you; you are looking far better. And the sick lady, your friend?”

“She is gaining every day. She wished to be remembered to you.”

“ And your husband — I must congratulate him. Ah, Signor ! ”

The two men shook hands with each other rather gravely, but with great cordiality. There was a momentary pause, which Mr. Rushton broke by saying lightly,—

“ Come, Doctor, let us go up to the hotel and have luncheon.”

As the name of the hotel was given to the coachman, Dr. Benoni looked up with an inquiring glance of surprise. Mr. Rushton returned this with a half-nod, and said,—

“ Yes, we are going to the old quarters. My wife wants to forgive that young scamp Antonio for his rascality.”

The doctor smiled, but there was a puzzled expression in his eyes. He was accustomed to the small evasions and deccits of Italian servants, and could quite sympathize with the good-natured leniency of employers upon occasions. But he knew the story of those hours of waiting and despair due to

Antonio's sensational stories and his neglect in delivering the later messages that had been sent from the hospital; and in view of the suffering that had been brought by this neglect, he could not comprehend the present attitude of the Signora.

James Rushton himself did not entirely comprehend Jessie's feeling just then. But when they were sitting quite by themselves on the deck of the steamer that bore them northward that afternoon, he said to her, half banteringly,—

“Jessie, I should like to have you tell me, if you can, why it is that you seem to entertain such a kindly feeling for that young rascal Antonio. He's a handsome boy, and lies, with a great deal of grace. I'll admit that he appeared quite overwhelmed with contrition when he grovelled over your hand — by the way, he saw you take that half-franc out of your purse as he came in.”

Jessie looked up into her husband's face with a curious smile. Presently the smile broke into a little laugh.

"Men are very dull," she said.

"I sha'n't contradict that. But enlighten my dulness on this point. Tell me why you not only forgave that young villain, but why you seemed almost grateful to him for nearly killing you."

"I *am* grateful to him. If"—her voice dropped into a lower tone, a soft blush crept into her pale cheeks—"if he had not nearly killed me, as you call it, I should not be here with you now,—I should not be your wife. You were brought to see that night, as I could never have told you, that my love was life or death to me. No words of mine, if I could have spoken them, could have convinced you of that."

His hand closed tightly about the thin little fingers that had stolen into his. He could not speak at once; but by and by he

repeated her words in that half-bantering manner that she knew so well, and that covered so much,—

“Men are very dull.”

Some time after this, when the wind had freshened up, and Jessie was lying well wrapped up on a steamer chair, her husband and Dr. Benoni paced up and down the deck together, in earnest conversation as they smoked their cigars. Once, as they passed the reclining figure, Mr. Rushton lowered his voice to say,—

“Doctor, tell me frankly what you think of my wife’s condition.”

“I think, my friend, that you will have to take great care of her. She has been living for a long time on hope and imagination.” The Italian spoke freely, for he had known all his friend’s story. “The Signora has no organic trouble, but she has become what you Americans call ‘run down.’ Buoyed up by hope, she has been living

for these past five years, not an unhappy life, but, unconsciously to herself, an exciting one. Robbed suddenly of her hope when she had come face to face with it again, the high-tensioned nerves broke down. No ; she has no organic disease, but she has lost her power of resistance, and we must be careful not to let any enemy enter.”

“ You think Palermo the best place to winter in ?”

“ Decidedly. The air is soft and equable, not too warm or too cold, and thus makes no demand upon the nerves. It is also a sensible tonic.”

The doctor just here, turning to re-light his cigar, caught the perturbed expression of his companion’s face, and immediately hastened to say,—

“ There is no reason for you to be disheartened,—only to have care. Your wife has one aid to her recovery,—the greatest,—she is very happy. You will save her

with this ; and, my friend," — the Italian hesitated a second, then went on calmly, — " you have also earned a right to be happy yourself if any man has. But for you a good many of us would now be lying in a Neapolitan cemetery. You have done great service, Signor ; you have saved many lives at the risk of your own."

At this concluding sentence, pronounced with a good deal of emphasis, the doctor looked up with a significance of expression that was not lost upon his companion.

A right to be happy ! James Rushton sent a backward glance down the stormy, shadowed past, — twenty years. He had saved many lives. One life that was dearer than all others, that he had unwittingly put in peril, it was now not only his privilege but his duty to guard. He had not sought happiness : it had come to him.



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